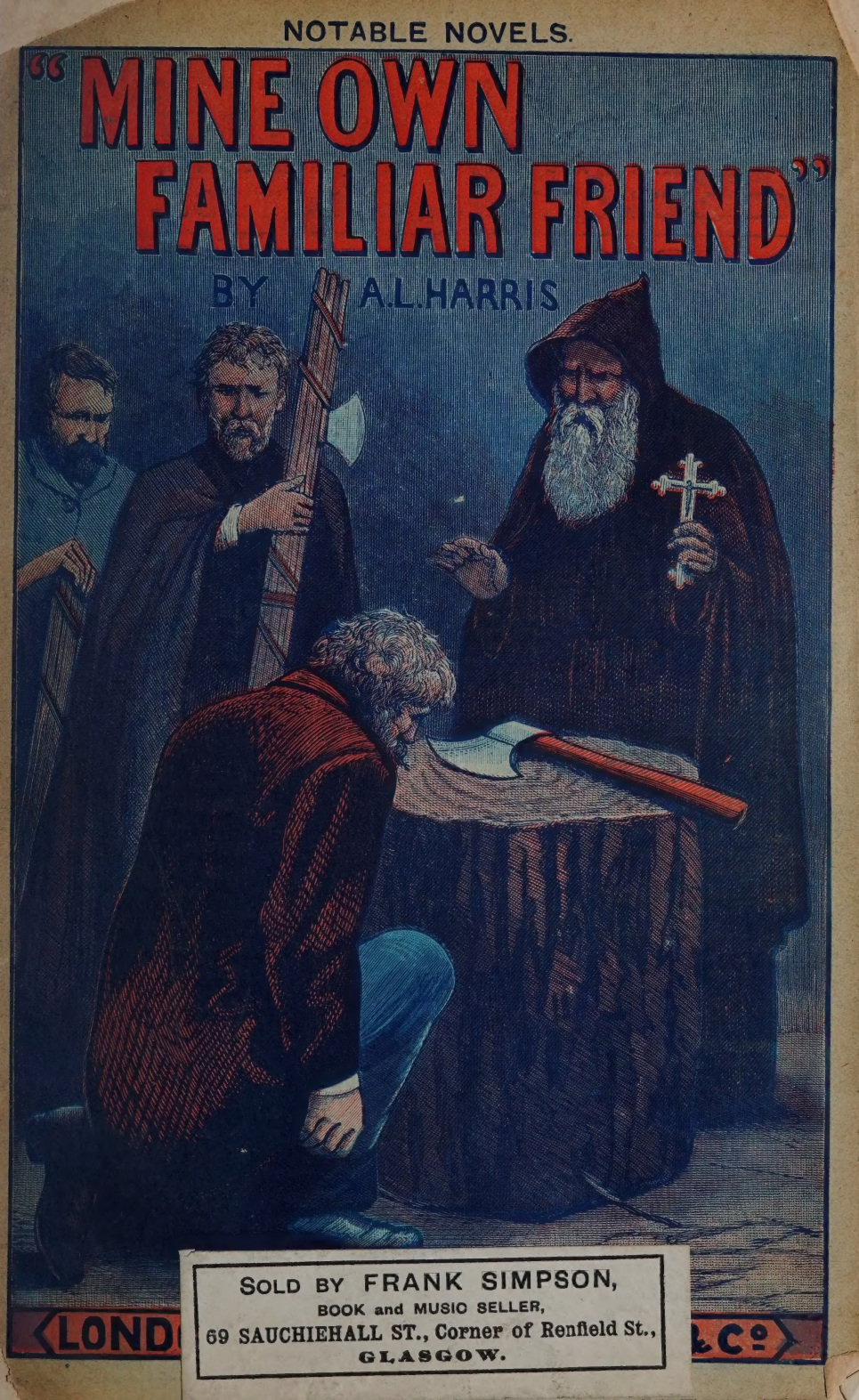
NOTABLE NOVELS.

"MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND"

BY A.L.HARRIS



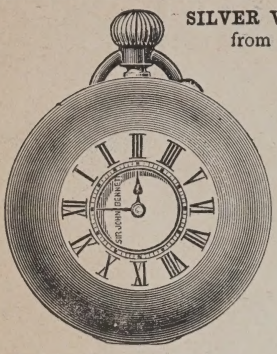
SOLD BY FRANK SIMPSON,
BOOK and MUSIC SELLER,
69 SAUCHIEHALL ST., Corner of Renfield St.,
GLASGOW.

SIR JOHN BENNETT, LTD.

Watch and Chronometer Manufacturers,

65 & 64 CHEAPSIDE, LONDON, E.C.

SILVER WATCHES. from **£2.** | **GOLD WATCHES.** from **£5.**



£5

THE CHEAPSIDE ¾-PLATE KEYLESS LEVER WATCH.

with CHRONOMETER BALANCE, and jewelled in thirteen actions. in strong silver case, with crystal glass. The cheapest watch ever produced. Air, damp, and dust tight.

Free and safe per post for £5

£15.

In return for Post Office Order, free and safe by post, one of

BENNETT'S GENTLEMEN'S GOLD KEYLESS LEVER WATCHES,

with CHRONOMETER BALANCE, and jewelled in thirteen actions; in all respects a thoroughly sound, useful watch.

Sir JOHN BENNETT, Ltd., 65 & 64 Cheapside.

£10

In return for a £10 Note, free and safe per post, one of

BENNETT'S LADIES' GOLD KEYLESS HALF-HUNTING WATCHES.

Perfect for time, beauty, and workmanship, with keyless action, air-tight, damp-tight, and dust-tight. Gold chains at manufacturers' prices.

£5

From £5, free and safe per post, one of

BENNETT'S LADIES' GOLD KEYLESS WATCHES.

Perfect for time, beauty, and workmanship, with keyless action, air-tight, damp-tight, and dust-tight. Gold chains at manufacturers' prices.

CATALOGUES POST-FREE.

EVERY KIND OF JEWELLERY.

LADIES' GOLD NECKLETS, GUARDS, and **ALBERT CHAINS,** from **£2**

GOLD BROOCHES & EARRINGS, from **£1.**

GENTLEMEN'S GOLD ALBERT CHAINS, in all patterns and qualities, from **£3.**

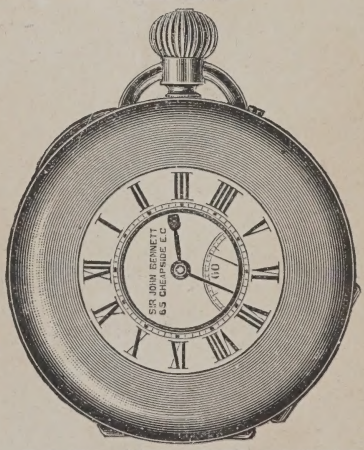
GENTLEMEN'S DIAMOND and **SIGNET RINGS.**

GENTLEMEN'S LINKS, SOLITAIRES, STUDS, &c.

GOLD LOCKETS mounted with **PRECIOUS STONES.**

LADIES' GEM, KEEPER, and **WEDDING RINGS.**

A large assortment, from £1.



£25.—"The SIR JOHN."

A STANDARD GOLD KEYLESS ¾-PLATE HALF-CHRONOMETER WATCH, accurately timed for all climates. Jewelled in thirteen actions. In massive 18-carat case, with Monogram richly emblazoned. Free and safe per post.

Sir JOHN BENNETT, 65 Cheapside, London.

CLOCKS.

The Finest Stock in London.

DRAWING-ROOM, DINING-ROOM, HALL, LIBRARY, OFFICE,

And other CLOCKS, at prices lower than ever.

ESTIMATES given for CHURCH, TURRET, and other PUBLIC CLOCKS.

£25 Hall Clock,

To Chime on Eight Bells.

In oak or mahogany.

With bracket and shield, **Three Guineas** extra

Estimates for Turret Clocks.

Sir JOHN BENNETT (Limited), 65 Cheapside, London.

£20, £30, £40 Presentation Watches. Arms and Inscriptions emblazoned to order.

SIR JOHN BENNETT, LTD.

65 & 64 CHEAPSIDE, LONDON, E.C.

RBTE34H

"MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND"

"MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND."

A Tale of a Secret Society.

BY

A. L. HARRIS.

LONDON AND NEW YORK:
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
1890.

[*All rights reserved.*]

CONTENTS.

Page

PART I.

THE NARRATIVE OF CESARE ROBAUDI - - - - - - 9
THE NARRATIVE OF THE ENGLISHMAN - - - - - - 26
CONTINUATION OF THE NARRATIVE OF CESARE ROBAUDI - - 33

PART II.

CONTINUATION OF THE NARRATIVE OF CESARE ROBAUDI - - 39
THE ENGLISHMAN'S SECOND NARRATIVE - - - - - - 80

PART III.

CONTINUATION OF THE NARRATIVE OF CESARE ROBAUDI - - 85
THE ENGLISHMAN'S THIRD NARRATIVE - - - - - - 101
CONTINUATION OF THE NARRATIVE OF CESARE ROBAUDI - - 105
NARRATIVE OF THE GIRL BLANCHE - - - - - - - 116
CONCLUDING NOTE OF GEOFFREY HAMILTON - - - - - 125

PART I

"MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND."

PART I

The Narrative of Cesare Robaudi.

I AM an old, a very old man, you would say, as you saw my white hairs and the lines and furrows of my countenance; a feeble old man, too, as you noticed me leaning heavily on the stout stick with which I support my wavering steps. And yet my years are not very many more in number than those of that stout, upright, ruddy faced and brown bearded Englishman in whose cheery companionship I hope to spend the years—it may be the few years—which yet remain to me of my shattered, wasted life. "My son," I call him. I who am alone and solitary in this weary world, without kith or kin, or one to bear my name or follow after me when I am gone. Alone, at least, save for those two—this man and the girl—the dark eyed, fair young girl, on whose slender arm I so often lean as I make my slow and scanty progress. A grandfather and grand-daughter, say the curious or sympathetic souls who watch us as we pass; and yet the years which divide me, the decrepit, from her, the young and blooming, are but a score or so. My hair is white and my form is bowed, but neither by age nor the weight of years, for I should be, according to the passage of time, a man still in the prime of life. I am old, but in sorrow, and bent, but by the burden of the great wrongs that I have suffered and the weight of the overmastering dread that is always upon me; the dread of that fate which I know in my heart—however much I may try to conceal it, even from myself—nothing can avert; the fear of that relentless Power which makes no hiding place secure but the grave. For only there may I be safe from the pursuer. It is in

vain that they seek to assure me that no harm, no danger, shall, or can, befall me here—here in this island home to which I have fled with the girl, the sacred charge I have taken upon myself, and for whose sake I have called down this vengeance upon my head. I smile, and they think I am at ease ; but in every whisper I hear the sound "Traditore," and in every shadow see the dark form with the uplifted arm holding the instrument of death!

Perhaps it is well to know the manner of my death, if it be a violent one, such as I fear: to know the shape in which I must look for it, though I may not know the direction from which it will come. I know that it will be silent, stealthy, sure, but that it will be neither poison nor the bullet. The first would be too uncertain, there would be too many difficulties in the way of administering it; the second would be too noisy. No, there must be no loud report, to call everyone's attention to the spot; no tell-tale puff of smoke to catch the eye: but the knife driven surely and steadily home by a hand which knows no faltering, and dares not show pity, even if it would.

There is nothing like personal fear to insure the carrying out of a command: the knowledge that the victim, if you fail or refuse, will be yourself, and that you would take the place of the man you might otherwise be inclined to spare. There is no better plan than this to procure absolute and unquestioning obedience. Perhaps you may think these words of mine sound wild and mysterious, but if you read on they will become plain to you, and you will understand my meaning. Often, I occupy myself in imagining how the end will come. I see myself walking homeward at dusk. Perhaps I come by the way of the orange grove; perhaps I pass through the Market Square, and turn down under the Colonnade; and when I come to where the shadows are deepest, or the branches of the trees are so thick overhead that they shut out the sky, I think I hear a rustling among the leaves, or see the outline of some dark body projected on the ground before me; but before I can turn, before I have time to realize my own danger, someone leaps out upon me—someone who is hidden by an angle of the wall, or some jutting portion of masonry; or who crouches in the shadow of the trees.

There is a flash of steel—a groan—a heavy fall—the sound of footsteps fleeing in the distance—and then, all is still!

Or I wake some night—wake with a start! Is that a footfall on the floor, beside my bed? or only the patter of heavy raindrops on the leaves outside my window? Is that the sound of someone breathing in quick, short gasps? or is it only the throbbing of my own heart that I can hear? I feel for the weapon which always lies close at hand, under my pillow. But before I can grasp it the blow is struck—a heavy downward blow — and then a gurgling moan and—silence.

These are terrible thoughts to carry about with you, and it is no wonder that, when the physician has poked you in the chest and side with strangely shaped instruments, and listened to your breathing, and then, shaken his head over you, that you heave a sigh of relief, and almost thankfulness, when you are told that there is something wrong with your heart; that you must not give way to any excitement, or trouble yourself about anything, but keep very calm and quiet — directions so easily given but so hard to fulfil—or else you will go out some day like the flame of a candle.

I am doomed, inevitably, inexorably; and my only hope is that the hand of Death may fall upon me before that of human vengeance overtakes me, as it will if I live long enough. You will notice that I have referred to the other man as "The Englishman," from which fact you will gather that I am not of that nation myself. No, I am not an Englishman, though I write your cold, harsh language with ease and correctness; but were you to hear me speak it, the cultivated ear would at once detect my foreign accent.

I am Italian by birth and parentage, though it is years since I have seen my native land. I am Italian, and love my country with an exceeding love, and yet the sound of my own language, or the chance meeting with a compatriot, drives the blood from my cheek and chills my very heart within me. How all this is, and why, I am about to write; though I feel that my poor pen will but faintly picture forth those woful scenes, and deal but feebly with those dark memories it is now destined to recall.

Years, many years, ago I suffered a terrible injustice. A crime was committed, a political crime; on the mere suspicion of having been a participator in which, I was dragged from my home and flung into prison. Papers were found upon me—incriminating papers—of which I swore, truth-

fully, but unavailingly, I knew nothing, nor how they came there. Now I know whose hand placed them where they might easily be found, but I must not speak of that yet. It was enough that I was suspected of, at anyrate, a willingness to conspire against the government, and it was proved, on good authority, that at some time or other I had spoken seditious words, and uttered vague threats against those in high places.

I was the only son of my mother, and "she was a widow," but I was taken from her, and she was left desolate and helpless in her old age. I was young, and Bianca Ferri, my betrothed, was beautiful and devoted; but I was torn from her arms to meet her never again in this world.

The chief witness against me at my trial, and what an unwilling one I could only guess, was my comrade and bosom friend, Antonio Laroni. My heart bled for him, even in the midst of my own overwhelming misfortunes, to think how he must suffer in having thus to give testimony against his old companion. I judged of his feelings by what I knew would have been mine in a like case. Poor 'Tonio! I tried vainly to catch his eye that I might give him some token of sympathy, so that he might know I bore him no ill-will for his reluctant evidence. And yet, this very unwillingness of his proved most unfortunate for me and in his bewilderment and contrition he was betrayed into admissions which weighed more heavily against me than aught else.

Things, trifles in themselves, little outbursts of rebellion, the rash and foolish tirades of impetuous youth against the existing state of affairs, uttered in the heat of excitement and passion, in the companionship of other equally reckless and congenial spirits—utterances I had forgotten and hardly recognized as mine at all, were proved against me from his faltering and unwilling lips, and all went to swell the mass of trivial, but disastrous evidence against me, and add to the weight of my sentence.

Poor, unfortunate Antonio! Only once did I succeed in meeting his glance.

As he was about to leave the court, in the deep dejection which I knew he could not help but feel for his unhappy share in my misfortunes, he raised his head for the first and only time during the proceedings—hitherto he had kept it bent upon his breast, with every appearance

of the profoundest melancholy—I sprang forward, but was immediately dragged back by my jailers.

"Antonio!" I cried in agony, "My mother!—Bianca!"

They struck me on the mouth.

"Be silent, dog, traitor that you are!"

But he had heard me, and for the moment a strange, wild smile passed across his pallid features, and I knew that he had heard me and understood.

I was taken away to the prison of M—— R——. There I lay, year after year, hopeless and mad with the longing for liberty. There were 450 other political prisoners immured in that dismal fortress, and to the number of thirteen were crowded together in one noisome cell of three metres square.

During the day we crouched there together, haggard, unwashed and despairing. In the night we lay upon the ground, while the rats came out from their holes and crannies and gambolled merrily over our prostrate forms, responding in shrill squeals of defiance to the curses and blows which were hurled at them.

It was a fearful time. It turned men into demons, reviling man and blaspheming God,—that such things should be in a Christian land!

As time went on our numbers diminished, five out of the thirteen were taken out in a batch and shot in the early morning, and the rest the fever and the ague carried away to an unhallowed grave in the prison precincts.

At last, in the fifth year of my captivity, I was left alone—the sole occupant of my prison cell. During these long, these endless years of my imprisonment I passed through three different mental phases. The first was that of profound and agonizing despair, combined with a wild yearning for liberty—to be free at any cost or sacrifice.

I would have entered into any contract with any power, human or divine, celestial or infernal, by which I might have been enabled to pass my prison bounds. I tremble even now as I think that I would, had it been possible, have signed away my immortal soul if I might thereby have been delivered from my bonds.

After that, there succeeded a dull, hopeless apathy, which was the most dangerous period of all—because through that I was in danger of losing those qualities which separate the man from the beast—and becoming a mere sentient, helpless log of poor humanity. I humbly thank God and the Blessed Virgin that

I was spared this crowning horror, which might well have befallen me but for Divine interposition. For there was a man among us there, in the prison, whose misery of mind and body was such that he sunk under its weight, and one morning, when the thin, struggling ray of light which penetrated the high grated window far above our heads, showed that another day of wretchedness had dawned for the huddled mass of human beings in this their Inferno, it also showed us our poor brother in affliction, Giuseppe Ronconi, sitting upon his hard straw stuffed pallet, clad in the ragged garments which scarcely sufficed to cover his gaunt, famine worn frame, and chanting fragments of gay love songs, with a smile upon the countenance, from which the light of reason had for ever departed. Even in the midst of our own crushing hardships and unspeakable misery there was not one but could spare a tear for poor Giuseppe, who laughed and sang all day long, until the fever took him and he was at rest. Then, when one by one my companions were taken from me, either by disease or the more merciful death from the rifles of the carbineers in the prison square, and I was left alone, another tide of feeling swept over my soul, and I thirsted madly for revenge!—revenge upon those who had thus consigned me to a living tomb, in the prime of my youth and strength.

"Vengeance! vengeance!" I cried, night and day in the solitude of my cell, with none to hear but God. Vengeance for the irreparable wrongs that nothing but blood could wipe out. With a bent and rusty nail—an inestimable treasure—I carved the rude semblance of a cross upon the stone wall of the dungeon, and on it I swore that if ever I were permitted to leave my prison house alive I would be terribly avenged—how, or upon whom, I knew not yet—but, from the day that my foot crossed its threshold, my life should have but one object and one aim. I would devote myself, body and mind, heart and soul, to vengeance. I swore it—I, Cesare Robaudi, and whether or no I have kept my vow remains to be seen.

Seven years passed—think of that, some of you for whom the years pass so smoothly and swiftly that the progress of time is hardly marked, or felt—seven years out of the best part of a man's lifetime spent in bondage and affliction! Seven years, during which I only saw the light of day through the

narrow, grated window of my cell; or the blue sky of Italy —far over my head, in the high-walled, confined inclosure of the prison square, where from time to time, we were turned in like sheep to breathe the air, and keep our limbs from becoming altogether useless from the prison damps, and our lungs from being choked by the foul atmosphere, which was enough to have stifled the very life out of one. And all the while I knew that the sun was shining, the grapes were ripening, and the white sails of the fishing smacks glancing across the blue waters of the bay. And all these years I was not allowed to receive or send one word of communication from or to the outside world. Those who belonged to me knew not whether I was alive or dead, and their fate was equally unknown to me. My mother—my widowed mother—of whom I had been the sole support, was she still living? One solace I had in the thought that Antonio would be as a son to her, and see that she lacked nothing that he could give her; but for that she might have starved while I languished in durance. I was grateful at least for that. But Bianca—my beautiful Bianca!—whose face had been the inspiration of many an artist, as she sold her coral wares at the corner of the Piazza Nuova; but she was proud, my Bianca, and snapt her fingers in their faces, as they begged, cap in hand, for permission to transfer those glowing features to canvas. "My face is my own, and as the good God made it, and I will not have half a dozen Biancas laughing at me out of picture frames in the shop windows. I have said it!"

Was she still faithful? Could I, dare I, ought I to hope it? —she who had such troops of admirers that it took all the fingers of both hands when she reckoned them. And she had flouted them all for me! Even dear old 'Tonio Laroni was reported to have sighed for her in vain; but it had made no difference in our friendship—nothing could, or would ever do that. He, at anyrate, I should find unchanged if we ever met again in this world.

One morning I heard a trampling of feet, and a jingling of keys, then a sound of the turning of locks and the opening of iron doors. There was a murmur of voices, mingled with sobs and cries. The steps came onward, and paused at the entrance of my cell. There was the turning of the heavy key in the lock, the door was flung open wide, and I saw two or three tall figures of men in

gorgeous uniform, with orders on their breasts, together with the governor of the gaol. One of them, and the most distinguished looking, had a paper in his hand.

"Cesare Robaudi," he exclaimed, in commanding tones, "it is my duty to announce to you the news of your pardon, together with that of those others who were concerned in the affair in which you were also implicated. You are free, and may you use the liberty graciously accorded to you worthily!"

Free! pardoned! I who was guiltless in thought and deed! Free at last, and with seven years of my life missing! The words fell upon my ear unmeaningly. If I were innocent, how came it that I was here; if guilty, why was I thus pardoned? Now that the madly longed for moment of emancipation had arrived, I felt no joy; nothing but stupefaction, and neither moved nor spoke.

"Pig! dolt! imbecile!" cried one of the officials, "have you no morsel of gratitude, no sense left in your worthless carcass? Pah! let us leave him, Excellency, and pass on to the next."

They passed on, and with their presence the cloud which obscured my brain, and the numbness which oppressed my heart passed too. I leaped for joy, I sang, I laughed, I sobbed aloud in ecstasy. Then, in the midst of my wild glee my eyes suddenly fell upon the rudely sculptured cross upon the wall, and I remembered my vow. Vengeance for my vanished youth; for my blighted hopes and ruined life! I had sworn to devote the remainder of my existence, if it ever became my own—to do with as I willed, to this one aim and object. The thought sobered me. But first—surely first I might give a brief space to the cause of friendship, and the bliss of reunion with my loved ones, if—there was a terrible possibility in that "if." What changes might not those seven years have worked? I trembled at the thought of other heavy griefs which might yet await me outside the prison gates. But I put it away from me and tried to forget, to ignore all such dismal forebodings. Had I not already suffered enough? It was impious to anticipate further ills. Were there not the blessed Virgin and all the Saints to protect me? But—what had they done for me until now? Had their intervention saved me from a single pang? The thought was blasphemous, but would recur to me again and again. Had I not prayed and worn

out the flesh upon my knees in wild petitions for help and succour? I crossed myself in haste and terror. Had I, then, unconsciously become a heretic? That would be worse than all. Was I not now at least free through some agency, human or divine, and did I dare to cast reflections upon the Holy Mother of God herself because the hour had been so long delayed? I forced myself to think of other things and not listen to the evil promptings within. My mother —would she be much changed? Should I know her? for she was growing old even when I last saw her; and, what was more, would she know me? Trust her for that. I should only have to walk in upon her and say, "Mother, your Cesare is restored to you," and long before the words would have passed my lips her arms would be round me, and she would be pouring out tears and exclamations and blessings and ejaculations to every saint in the calendar, with her brown, wrinkled face, quivering all over with emotion. But I must be careful what I did. Perhaps it would be wiser not to break the good news to her myself, but get some good neighbour to prepare her first, or the agitation and shock she would feel at the alteration in me might be too much for her strength. For an alteration — a terrible alteration must, I knew, have taken place in me during these long years spent in captivity.

It was seven years since I had beheld my natural face in the glass. Seven years since I was a vain, foolish young fellow, who was wont to take a host of pains to get just the one shade of red in scarf or necktie that went best with his olive skin and dark hair. I had now acquired a tangled mass of beard (that must come off at the first opportunity), and there were even white hairs in it. I passed my fingers through my once curling locks; they hung dank and dishevelled over my brow, but I could not judge of the colour or tell the white hairs by the feel; but passing my hand over my face I needed no mirror to tell of hollow cheeks, sunken eyes and a forehead ploughed with lines, wrought there by hopeless misery, want and suffering. I must, indeed, be terribly changed. My limbs, I knew, were wasted, my shoulders bowed by their burden of despair, my fingers crooked and my once vigorous frame distorted by the racking pains of fever and ague, damp and disease.

I thought of Bianca and groaned. What would she say to such a lover as this? If she

were still free and faithful to my memory would the fondest love suffice to support the shock which my changed appearance might inflict? But there was one other, beside my mother, in whose heart I need fear no change. What would it matter to him that I returned destitute of all those graces which I had once deemed mine! How eagerly I should seek him out after I had embraced my mother! How he would stare at me first of all in astonishment, then, casting everything aside, seize me by both arms—

I dashed the tears from my eyes, called up by joyful anticipations. Antonio, old friend! how I longed for a sight of your face and a grasp of your honest hand. The mere thought of meeting you once more unnerved me quite! Surely this must be the love spoken of "passing the love of women," which made me forget even my promised bride in the faithful comrade and dear companion of my youth.

I pass now to the day when I found myself again in my own dear city of Genoa. I had travelled thither on foot, and it was about noon when I found myself entering the well known, though, by me, long untrodden streets of "La Superba," as she has been so fondly and worthily described. I was hungry, ragged and footsore, having eaten only once in the last twenty-four hours, but filled with a great and overwhelming flood of gratitude and gladness towards Heaven that I was once more within her gates and free.

Passing through the "Via del Campo" I paused to drink at the fountain in the "Piazza Vacchero," which marks the spot where Giulio Vacchero was executed for high treason in 1628. From thence I proceeded onward with hasty steps and wildly beating heart—on and on—until I came to a side street, to the left of the church of S. Siro, in which stood the little tumble-down dwelling-house which had been my birthplace. But there was a gap in the row of buildings just where it should have stood—the crazy, dark, little habitation through whose low doorway I had had to enter with bowed head in those other days! What did it mean? My heart stood still as though an icy hand had grasped it! There was the barber's shop, with its gaily decorated pole—there was the house of the straw-worker, but just between them, where had stood the little tenement in which I had first opened my eyes upon the world, was a heap of broken bricks and other rubbish! I saw a stout, good-humoured looking woman sitting at a door opposite, with her lace

pillow and bobbins, and crossing the road, stumbling as I did, like one half blind, over the stones in my way, and quivering in every limb, as though the prison ague again held me in its grip, I stood before her. She gave me a kindly greeting, and then waited for me to speak, glancing at me inquiringly the while.

"Can you tell me," I began, moistening my dry lips with my tongue, "why—where—what has become of the old woman who sold water-melons, and used to live in the house opposite, which has been pulled down?"

"Ah!" with a tear appearing in the corner of her dark eye. "Rest her soul!—she died five years ago and more."

"Dead!" I re-echoed, faintly, "Dead—dead?"

She looked at me in pity, noting my evident distress and weary wayworn figure, and asked,

"Poor creature! you knew her, then?"

I made a motion with my head, finding speech impossible.

"Well, after her son was taken from her and sent to prison, she had a hard struggle to live—and she was proud, very proud, was old Teresa, and would accept help from no one, and so—" She paused and looked at me furtively. What was the connection between her old neighbour and the man who now hung upon her words and devoured her with his eyes?

"And so she shut herself up in the little house, and was seen by no one for many days."

Again she hesitated with the same mutely inquiring look, then continued, "When at last the neighbours forced the door and entered, they found her dead, and not a crust in the place."

"Then she died——?" The words came in hoarse, unnatural accents from my burning throat.

"Of starvation, dear soul!" Wiping the tears from her eyes with her gaily striped apron. "Though the dear Lord knows there were many and many who would have helped her gladly, and shared their last meal with her, but it was too late."

Too late! Oh! the anguish in those words!

"But," I cried, suddenly, in horrified amazement, "there was one Antonio Laroni, the friend of Cesare Robaudi, surely he at least came to her assistance, or would have done so, had he known of her necessity?"

"He!" screamed the woman, throwing up her hands. "Why, old Teresa would have died a hundred deaths sooner than have touched a crumb of his!"

I heard these mad words with a feeling of stupefaction.

"But he was Cesare's friend—the friend of the poor woman's son," I explained, roughly.

"Ah," she cried, interrupting me, "that poor Cesare! The unhappy fellow! If ever he returns, what misery awaits him!" Again she looked at me with a glance in which curiosity was mingled with compassion, "truly he is to be pitied—first of all betrayed by his own friend—"

"Betrayed!" I repeated, feebly, with a faint sense of astonishment, "by whom?"

"Does not everybody know," she continued, "that it was his own friend, this same Antonio Laroni, who laid the information against him?"

"Antonio Laroni!"—and I laughed brokenly, in spite of the iron grasp upon my heart. "Betrayed by *him*? Why, what folly is this that you are speaking?"

"No folly, indeed"—angrily from the woman, "as anyone will tell you. The man Laroni was jealous of him; they both loved the same girl, Bianca Ferri, a saucy hussy, and no such beauty, after all, that all the men should go crazy after her, as they did. Well, Cesare Robaudi was a handsome dare devil, and he won her away from all the rest; but not for long, for that villain, Antonio Laroni—"

"Woman," I shrieked, "are you mad, or is it I? Heavens! that such foul treason should be spoken of one who was the truest, staunchest friend that ever man had!" Then, as I saw she was about to retort vehemently, I thrust my fingers in my ears and fled from the spot, but her angry speech still pursued me as I ran: "I tell you that Antonio Laroni is a double-dyed villain! A false black-hearted traitor!"

I retraced my steps in a dream; those false, wicked words ringing in my ears:—Antonio a traitor—my mother dead! Antonio false and my mother dead—dead—dead! Turning off from the broad stately Via Nuova, I plunged instinctively, scarcely noticing where my steps led me, into the labyrinth of narrow lanes which descended to the left, towards the harbour. I only knew that I was going to seek my friend, to let him comfort me in my bereavement; to look in his face and read there the lines of truth and honesty.

My mother was dead, starved for the want of one of those hard crusts which even I had not lacked during all those years of my bondage. But there was still my faithful 'Tonio—my more than brother. I laughed, I sobbed in one breath, as I hurried on, thinking of that wicked woman, with her evil tongue — curses light upon it!—who would have

tried to make me distrustful of him.

Here was the street; in a moment I should see the little squeezed up corner shop, in the window of which he used to sit, day after day, employed upon the delicate goldsmith's work, at which he was an expert.

There he would sit to get the best light for his labour, as he cleaned and polished and repaired the wheels and delicate mechanism of the watches and clocks, and other articles that were submitted to his skill. How often I had tapped at that window and made him look up. Should I do so now?

If I did, how he would wonder at the unshorn, haggard individual, who confronted him and perhaps — I passed my hand across my eyes. There was the shop and the window—but the window was empty and the shop deserted.

Over the door was the old familiar name, in dingy letters of white paint, "Antonio Laroni"; but the door itself was locked, and there was no face at the window, no head bending over the work. Was Antonio dead, too? was there no one left? A sense of overwhelming despair swept over my soul as I gazed at the blank, desolate, tenantless habitation.

Someone came out of a house farther up the street and approached me as I stood motionless, as though devoid of all sense of feeling. I was conscious that he was regarding me curiously, and would have asked information of him had I been capable of framing the inquiry; but I had not tasted food since the day before, and the double shock which had fallen upon me had crushed what little remaining strength was left in my enfeebled frame.

The man passed by me, then stopped, looked again, and, finally returning to me, asked, "Was I a stranger, and was I seeking the man Laroni, as there had been several after him lately, since he left?"

"Left! He was not dead, then!" I was not aware that I had uttered the words with my lips, but must have done so, since the man rejoined,

"Dead! no, not he," contemptuously (as though poor 'Tonio were to blame in that matter). "He took himself off, bag and baggage, on hearing the report of the release of his old friend Cesare Robaudi from prison, and ran away one day before it was light, no one knows where, or cares, except it may be Cesare Robaudi himself!"

I was too feeble and exhausted now, in mind and body, to express my confusion

and amazement, otherwise than by a blank, foolish stare. Apparently the man had a story to tell, and was anxious to tell it, for, without waiting for further encouragement, he proceeded, "Perhaps you are a friend of Laroni's and won't care to hear what I have to say about him; but in any case I declare to you that he—Antonio—is a false friend and a black hearted traitor!"

Why, this was what the woman had said! The woman who had told me of my mother's death and tried to convince me of my friend's falsehood, and now, what was this that the man was saying:

"Antonio betrayed his friend through jealousy and love of Bianca Ferri, and when he heard, a month ago, of the probable release of poor Cesare, he was struck by a sudden panic, and, fearing his just vengeance when he came to know all, fled from Genoa, taking with him his wife and child!"

I heard all this as in a dream, but caught the words "wife and child," and must have repeated them absently after him, for he continued, "Have I not told you that he married Bianca Ferri within a month of his friend's committal to prison? But what can you expect of a woman, especially of one with such a pair of eyes and a smile for all alike? For a week she wept, and wept and vowed she would never take another lover as long as she lived; but, as I have said, she married Antonio Laroni within a month," and he shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands expressively. Then I awoke from my lethargy of despair.

"How do you know," I demanded, fiercely, "that Antonio Laroni was the villain you declare him to be, and how dare—?"

I stopped, exhausted by the extremes of emotion and fatigue which I had undergone, and my voice died away in a hoarse, inarticulate murmur. The man looked at me half angrily, half contemptuously. "Body of Bacchus!" he exclaimed, contempt for my ignorance finally gaining the victory over his other feelings, "who is there who does not know it in this quarter? Ask whom you will, they will tell you the same—Antonio Laroni acted the part of a traitor and spy, and acted it badly too; for everyone but poor Cesare knew it. The very boys of the neighbourhood would hoot at him as he walked and come and stand at a safe distance from his door — for 'Tonio was a passionate man, and his stick fell heavily across

the shoulders of any he caught in the act—and call out, 'Ho, Antonio! What have you done with the thirty pieces of silver?' This made him mad—this, and the falling off of his trade, for no one who knew of his villainy would employ him, and he became a very devil at times, so that none dared approach him, not even Bianca or the child; for he thought but little of a blow, and would strike her with his fist, and curse her for having bewitched him. Poor Bianca, there is little enough left of her beauty now—not that I pity *her* much! No, no; she brought it on herself, and a woman seldom gets more than she deserves. It is the poor Cesare who is to be pitied, when he returns, if he ever does, and finds his mother dead, his friend false, and the girl he loved married to a brute who half murders her in some of his rages!"

The man must have been flattered by the absorbing and breathless interest with which his tale was received; rarely had he met with such a listener. Then, after a moment's breathing space, he again continued, while I still held him with my eye, over which a film appeared to be gradually forming and blotting out the street, the speaker, the houses opposite and the sky overhead.

"It is said," were the words I heard, "that Laroni belonged to—" The man lowered his tone, came nearer and whispered the rest of his sentence into my ear—"one of the branches of the 'Society'—that he would have starved before this, but for the help he received from Them; and it is said that it is 'They' who have aided him now to leave the country!" He looked round timorously as he finished this speech; for the Power of which he spoke was one which men mentioned with bated breath, in fear and trembling.

With an effort, I brought my failing senses back again from the abyss of doubt and horror in which they were wandering, and asked, in a husky whisper, "Is it known where he has gone?"

He shook his head. "It is thought by some to that unhappy land of fogs and mist, where one never sees the sun but one month in the year; for Filippo Campana picked up a piece of torn paper from the floor of the shop after he had left, with 'Antonio Laroni, Inghilterra,' written upon it. If so," again dropping his voice to a whisper, for there was danger in the very mentioning of such a subject, "it must have been 'They' who helped him, else where did the

money come from for the journey? Ah, if I were Robaudi, I know what I would do when free, and when I had discovered his villainy towards me!"

I looked the question my lips refused to put, and the garrulous one replied, "Why, look you, were I Cesare Robaudi, I would follow him even there, to the country where the fog is as one of the plagues of Egypt—even if I had to beg my bread by the way—and then," licking his lips, "I would hunt him down like the dog he is, and drive my good knife in between his ribs, until it reached his black heart and let out his life blood to the last drop! Bah! he is a spy and a traitor, I spit upon his memory!"

I think that soon after this the man must have left me and passed on, for my next recollection is that of finding myself creeping slowly along through several streets, supporting myself, as I went, against the walls of the houses in my route—whither? I knew not, only that I must go on and on until I fell. I had eaten nothing, as I have said, since the day before. I had tramped many miles in the heat of the sun; I was worn out and enfeebled by the long years of cruelty and imprisonment I had undergone; and I had returned at last to find every hope extinguished, each fond anticipation destroyed, and that in the most terrible heart-rending manner. Death and betrayal where I had looked for fondest welcome and joyful re-union! Faint with hunger and fatigue, worn with suffering and sorrow, my only desire was that I might lie down, too, and die before the morning; if I could find a hole, or a corner, in which to hide myself from the cold gaze of the curious and the scornful. I raised my eyes to the setting sun, now sinking behind the distant hills. Its last rays caught and gilded the cross which ornamented some sacred building in the foreground, and tipped its points with fire. What association had I with that holy emblem that it arrested my sinking senses and brought back my thoughts from the dark illimitable maze in which they were wandering? I gazed at the cross high up over my head, and as I looked it faded away, and I saw another scene in its place. A damp, stone dungeon in the foundations of the castle, far from the light of day, on one massive wall of which a man was slowly, and with infinite pains carving out a rough figure with some rude, pointed instrument, which from time to time escaped from his cramped, distorted fingers, and fell, with a sharp, metallic sound

upon the floor of his noisome chamber; only to be recovered after much weariful and prolonged groping in the perpetual twilight of that drear abode.

My oath! How could I dare to die with that unfulfilled oath lying heavy upon my soul? I *must* live until I had wiped it out in blood. Little thought I when I took upon me that vow on whose head my vengeance would recoil—not upon King or Kaiser, Government, or those who sit in high places, but upon the friend and companion of my boyhood, whom I had loved and trusted with my whole heart. What was it the man had said to-day, or yesterday—or was it less than an hour ago, "*Were I Cesare Robaudi, I would follow him and hunt him down like a dog!*"

Antonio, my once more than brother! if it be true—and oh! the thought that after all what I had heard might be false—false as the heart that conceived it and the tongue that uttered it—was sweeter than life and liberty itself!—but, if they have *not* lied to me, you shall die by the hand of that man you have so foully betrayed! I swear it by all the saints!

The Narrative of the Englishman.

I WAS sick of sight-seeing! I had been at it the greater part of the week; had walked up hundreds of flights of marble stairs, passed under dozens of marble porticos, inspected miles of pictures—most of them Old Masters, which I abhor—and seen almost as many sculptures, busts and torsos as I had men and women. I had acquired a chronic crick in the neck, an obliquity of vision, a splitting headache, and a firm determination not to be beguiled into anything further of the kind at any price. What I had seen, too, disappointed me; the churches were splendid with marble, painting and gilding, but, in my opinion, had seldom any real claims to architectural loveliness; in fact, glare and glitter seemed to make up the principal ingredients of beauty in the opinion of the Genoese. Even in the cathedral dedicated to him of the gridiron, and which is literally incrusted with marble, the only portions of it which I considered worthy of admiration were the three grand doors, and the lofty pointed arches. As for the eternal palazzos belonging to the Dorias and other great families, with staircases composed of solid blocks of Carrara marble, with suites of saloons of —I don't know how many hundred feet in length! and endless rows of windows, I would rather live in an almshouse than in one of those great, empty, echoing abodes of cheerless magnificence. And then the beggars! good heavens! the beggars! They met you everywhere; on the steps of the churches, at the corners of the streets—everywhere crowds and crowds, of every age, description, and sex; clamouring beggars, whining beggars, vociferous beggars, pertinacious beggars and insolent beggars.

They came down upon you like the army of Sennacherib. I treated them mostly all alike, with a determined shake of the head, and rapped out a "*non c'è niente*," according to the advice given me in my "Baedeker." Once I departed from this rule. It was in favour of one in whom the extremes of dirt and good looks met—a very ragged boy, with the face of an angel, and the most glorious eyes and beseeching voice I had yet encountered. I dropped a small

coin into his outstretched palm; but instead of the gratitude I felt I had a right to, and expected, he only looked at it discontentedly, and exclaimed, "*Ma Signore, è molto poco!*" After this, I turned a deaf ear alike to the imprecations and blessings showered upon me.

This was all very well as far as the beggars were concerned, but was of no avail whatever with regard to the gnats, which came in clouds, and hummed and buzzed and bit until I was a mere swollen mass of humanity. It was of no use ignoring them, as they rather preferred that course of conduct. Altogether, I had not enjoyed my day as far as it had gone, although, as it turned out, by far the most exciting episode was yet to come.

I was taking myself leisurely, and in a very bad temper, in the direction of my hotel, which was a quiet and unpretending, but very comfortable establishment, situated near the Exchange, and, in order to avoid the full glare of the sun, turned down a side street, which I found cool and practically deserted.

As I lounged along, still animated by a feeling of the bitterest enmity towards the insect world, I became aware of one other solitary figure ahead of me. I should not have noticed the man, except for one fact, which immediately impressed me with regard to him. I had been in Italy, travelling from one place to another for some weeks, and this was the first time I had seen a drunken man. This one was unmistakably intoxicated—at least, so it appeared to me—from the manner in which he lurched from one side to the other, staggering along in such a way that it was evident to the meanest comprehension that a crisis, or rather a crash, was only a matter of time. I was following his wavering movements with some curiosity, when all at once it came. With a sudden plunge forward, a flinging upwards of both hands, and what sounded like a deep groan he fell upon his face. I don't know to this day what instinct it was that made me stop and raise his head from the rough stony pavement on which he had fallen. Some prompting of curiosity or humanity, it must have been, for the helpless being lying at my feet, and which I shall, I think, never be sorry that I obeyed.

I had seen hundreds of drunken men, and women, too, in my own dear, beer-imbibing, native land, and it was no rare thing to see one of them deposited in the gutter, but— Well, anyhow, without wasting further time

and space by explaining why I acted as I did on this occasion, I will simply continue my narrative, and state that, having raised the man's head from the ground, I almost dropped it again in surprise, when I saw, instead of the flushed and bloated features I was prepared to behold, a countenance worn and emaciated, which must have belonged to one who had passed through a very furnace of affliction. It was damp with the dews of a great anguish, ghastly pale, and, but for a faint convulsive twitching at one corner of the thin colourless lips, almost corpse like in its rigidity. Even the average London policeman could scarcely have taken this for a case of "drunk and incapable." The first glance at the man's face contradicted at once my first erroneous impression. I had a pocket flask, containing about half-a-pint of weak brandy and water, such as I generally carry about me, and with some little difficulty I succeeded in making him swallow some.

All this time no one approached us; it seemed as though this man were given over entirely into my hands. After a second dose of my mixture he began gradually to recover: he opened his eyes and gazed about him feebly and confusedly, as though wondering where he was and how he came there. I thereupon administered a little more of the reviving fluid, after swallowing which, he sat up and looked at me.

I began to explain in my best Italian, such as it was, how it all came about.

"You were ill," I said, slowly, "the sun, or something, I suppose. I saw you fall and—"

He gave me a wan smile of comprehension, which made me feel as I had never felt before in all my life—it was so mournful, so pathetic, and at the same time so grateful. Poor chap! I felt very sorry for him for some reason, though I didn't know anything about him then to justify the feeling. I didn't like to leave him either, for it had occurred to me that the fit or faint, or whatever might have been the precise nature of this sudden illness, had, perhaps, been occasioned by want, exhaustion, or even downright starvation, so gaunt and hollow cheeked and sunken eyed was he. Having that impression, I felt it was perfectly impossible to leave him until I had provided him with the wherewithal to obtain a good square meal.

By Jove! no indeed! The thing was how to do it, without offending the poor chap; for some of your foreigners are beastly proud, and he didn't

seem by any means a common fellow, though his clothes, when I came to look at them, were in rags, and the shoes on his feet trodden down and worn into great holes.

He had begun to thank me, and was evidently preparing to move on. Something must be done.

Just then I noticed that the corner house of the street in which we were had the appearance of being a café or restaurant, or something of the sort.

"Come, my friend," I said, "come and take a little refreshment. Perhaps you have walked too far in the heat of the sun, and are faint."

He looked at me again in the same dazed, hopeless way, which was sad beyond all words or power of expression, and, added, in correspondingly patient, heart broken tones, "I have come from far, and must go still farther, nor have I tasted food since yesterday at noon."

"Come along, then," I cried, seizing him by the arm and helping him to stand upon his feet. Suddenly he seemed to remember something, and turning his eyes upon me, in surprise, asked—

"And why are you, a stranger, so good and gracious to me, an outcast? May the Blessed Virgin and—"

"Bosh!" I replied, relapsing into my native tongue and cutting short the stream of eloquence which seemed about to follow. "Come along!"

What would some of my fashionable friends have thought of me if they could have seen me supporting a ragged, disreputable (as, no doubt, they would one and all have denominated him) Italian tramp by the arm; for the poor beggar was so shaky upon his feet still that he could never have got along without my assistance. He accepted my proffered hospitality much more gracefully than I had offered it, and let me lead him to the door of the dingy little café without any resistance. Our appearance there excited some little surprise, and I have no doubt that the contrast between us was rather marked, particularly as I am generally chaffed by my intimate friends as being a bit of a dandy, and my tailor is an acknowledged luminary in the West End.

However, I took no notice, and the other poor fellow was too far gone, for the time, to think of anything beyond satisfying his hunger. Of course, he chose a horrid mess of maccaroni and oil and other atrocities. It was easy to see from the first mouthfuls he took that he was fairly famished,

though probably he was hardly aware of the fact until he began to eat.

I took a cup of coffee—which was very decent, considering—and a cigarette while my *protégé* was falling to. He looked a good deal better when he had finished, particularly after I had given him a cigarette, too, which he lit up and smoked with a gusto as though he had not enjoyed one for years—which was true enough.

Then, all at once, as I was thinking how I could manage to make a bolt of it—for I began to feel somewhat of a fool and wonder what I was going to do with the man—his gratitude apparently began to overwhelm him again; and, laying down his cigarette, he started once more, and this time with tears in his eyes, on the same tack—thanking me for my beneficence and sublime generosity and goodness towards such a poor miserable being as himself.

Of course, I couldn't stand very much of that sort of thing and tried to stop him; for, after all, what I had done for him had cost me something less than tenpence in English money, and a man doesn't want to be put on a pedestal and worshipped for that amount. However, he seemed rather hurt at not being allowed to express his feelings.

"Ah, Signor," he said, in that quiet, sorrowful tone of his, "yours are the only kind words I have heard, and yours the first kind action I have received for seven years." Then, without further preamble, he began, in a whisper, to tell me his story. I started at first, and felt far from comfortable on hearing that he had just come straight from prison, but remembered that in those parts a man is frequently hauled off for nothing at all, such as omitting to take off his hat when he meets a funeral, or singing a song of a wrong political tendency.

But, as he went on in that low, dead, monotonous tone, as though he were afraid of breaking all bounds, if once he let himself go, I felt nothing but indignation; for, notwithstanding my incomplete knowledge of his language, I understood enough to make out that he had suffered an awful piece of injustice at the hands of some person or persons.

That accounted for the look on the man's face, which no mere experience of poverty or ordinary hardship could have implanted there. Presently he stopped short.

"I dare not continue. The Signor will excuse me, but I know not who may overhear,

and then they might drag me back again from whence I have come, and I should never fulfil my vow."

I saw a wild glitter come into his eyes, and a spot of red appear on each cheek-bone, as he spoke these last words; he set his teeth together and his breath came in gasps. For a moment the thought occurred to me that he might be insane; but in another instant he had again composed himself, the colour faded away out of his thin hollow cheeks and they became as pallid as before.

A feeling of intense curiosity came over me to learn more of this man's history. I forgot common sense, mosquito bites, my new acquaintance's disreputable appearance, and everything else.

"Come with me to my hotel!" I exclaimed, "it is close by, and tell me all."

He acceded to my proposition without a murmur, as I have no doubt he would have done to any request I had liked to make. Those whom I met in the vestibule or encountered on the staircase leading to my private room fortunately seemed very little, if at all, surprised at my queer company.

Perhaps I was an artist and had just secured what I considered a likely "subject," which would account for much that was unusual, and at anyrate I was a "mad Englishman," which accounted for everything. Then, after I had, according to his own desire, locked both the doors of the room and allowed him to examine the fastenings of the windows, the bedroom beyond, and every possible and impossible recess or place of concealment, which might contain a listener or witness of any description, he continued his recital. By Jove! it made my blood boil when I heard of the horrible cruelty he had undergone! I strode up and down the room in a rage, kicking the furniture and footstools in default of anything better. Good Lord! what would I not have given to have pitched into some of those rascally officials belonging to that infernal prison, and punched their heads all round! Then he came to tell me of his return on this very day on which I had so strangely encountered him—of his mother's death from actual want—and then of his friend Antonio Laroni, for whom, it appears, hanging would be too much of a luxury. When he began to speak of him, of how he had trusted him, and believed him to be everything that was good and noble, there was a peculiar look came into his face, and a tone into his voice, which made me think at the time that if ever

those two met, it would be bad for Antonio. Even now Robaudi, as he tells me his name is, can hardly bring himself to believe him the villain he appears to be, or at least he is hoping against hope, for I fancy in his inmost heart he has no doubt of his treachery. It appears too that there was a girl mixed up in it, as though things were not bad enough without her helping to make them worse, which rather surprised me, as my new acquaintance appeared to be a man of at least fifty years of age, if not more, and consequently, you would have thought too old for that sort of folly; but I didn't pay very much attention to that part of his story. Perhaps I may as well mention now, instead of later, that I afterwards found that I had miscalculated his age by about twenty years. I asked my friend what he meant to do in the future. He declared his fixed and unalterable resolution of proceeding to England, where he believes this other man, Laroni, has bolted to, out of the way, and searching for him high and low. He thought he could make a living there, by following his original profession of cabinet making and wood-carving, but how to get there by way of a start he did not know, as he said he hadn't a friend left him in the world.

And now I'm going to relate a very foolish and rash act of mine, and one that I'm awfully ashamed of and hardly care to chronicle; for, after all, you know, very likely the man is an impostor, and his tale a tissue of lies from beginning to end. I say this to myself, but I don't think I believe it, in fact I'm sure I don't, and sometimes I feel most uncommonly glad that I acted as I did. If that man's face didn't tell the truth I'll never believe in my own judgment or powers of perception again, and you may write me down an ass for the rest of my natural life.

Well, to cut a long story short, for I'd no intention whatever of writing all this when I began, there was a certain roll of bank notes in my breast pocket; not much more than enough to furnish me with funds for the remainder of my trip. When Cesare Robaudi left me a couple of hours or so after he had entered the hotel with me, he carried the half of those notes away with him. With a sudden and uncontrollable impulse, I don't think I shall ever fully understand, I divided the amount then and there, and shared it equally between us. The half I kept for myself, and I find I shall have to cut things rather close now to make it sufficient for

my wants, and shall, in any case, have to bring my stay here to a conclusion, and relinquish my fondly cherished idea of visiting Pompeii and one or two other places I had set my heart on seeing.

I pass over his wild, impetuous gratitude and emotion, the way in which he fell upon his knees and sobbed like a woman, and, in fact, almost succeeded in making a fool of me as well as of himself. I will only record his parting speech.

"And what will you do," I asked, "if you discover without a doubt that Antonio Laroni was the man who betrayed you, after all?"

A savage gleam came into his eyes, and with a snarl like that of a wild animal, he hissed out,

"Antonio Laroni shall die the death of a dog!" From which remark, and more particularly from the manner in which he made it, I repeat my previous statement, and conclude, that if these two ever do meet it will be bad for Laroni. Then, after showering blessings upon my head, and committing me to the care of the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints in the Calendar, he at last left me.

Shall we ever meet again, I wonder, and shall I ever have cause to regret the helping hand which I have this day held out to this poor outraged and suffering soul? *I think not!*

Continuation of the Narrative of Cesare Robaudi.

I HAVE not thought it well to write myself an account of my first meeting with my friend and benefactor; but have given you, in its place, a description of the event as written in his own hand, and recorded in the journal which he has always accustomed himself to keep, and which he now allows me to copy by way of making the history of this portion of my life more complete. What a grand man he was (and is still) to look at, this gallant and generous hearted young Englishman! I call him young, though, as I learnt afterwards, he was but some eight or nine years my junior; and yet the gulf of time which then and now divides us might be a quarter of a century. In those seven years, of which I have spoken, I had aged at least that, and all the

while I had not seen my face in the glass, nor did I see it until after I had met with this wonderful new friend of mine. I thought of him as my friend, though at the time I did not even know his name, or whether I should ever look upon his face again.

Truly, it was a grand thing for me, Cesare Robaudi, the late prisoner and outcast, to feel that there was someone who, though so far above me in every way, was not ashamed, after I had told him all my story, to take me by the hand and say, "Courage, friend, let us hope there is a good time coming, for you as well as others." And then he turned and looked out of the window, and blinked his eyes and said strange, fierce sounding words to himself between his teeth; which I know now is the way in which Englishmen show that they are much moved by emotion. They do not tear their hair, or wring their hands, or cry out upon all the Saints to help them, as we do, but put their hands in their pockets and stride up and down very fast, and utter invocations to the Evil One. It was the next day after that he had filled my pockets with more money than I had ever dreamt of possessing before, and sent me on my way with good wishes, that, as I took my maccaroni before starting on my journey, at the same restaurant into which my noble patron had taken me when I was faint and starving on the day before, I saw, on suddenly raising my eyes from my plate, a strange, wild, grey haired man, with a long ragged beard, staring at me intently. I frowned after encountering his inquisitive and, as it seemed at the time, impertinent gaze, fixed steadfastly on me for some seconds. He frowned back at me; then, as I half rose from my seat, thinking to demand an explanation of this insolent and unjustifiable conduct on the part of a stranger, he did the same, and I saw that it was my own reflection in a mirror opposite to me, which had thus aroused my indignation. Could this indeed be I — this strange, gaunt, hollow eyed spectre of a man, who might have been the father of the Cesare Robaudi I had once known, and thought such a good looking, irresistible, fine young fellow? Could this be the same man whom I had heard described, but yesterday, as "a handsome dare devil"?

There was little enough of vanity left in me now, but I could scarcely forbear a groan as I looked at this grey shattered phantom of my once gay self!

Then I remembered to whom I owed this also—if what I had heard commonly reported was true—and that thought brought a colour to my wasted cheek, a fire to my dull eye, and a glow and vigour to my enfeebled frame; and I felt that were Antonio Laroni before me I could even then shake the life out of him like a rat! But first to find him, and I grudged now every moment which was not devoted to my task. I was refreshed and rested, with enough of money in my pocket to provide for my journey, and keep me in the strange country to which I was going until I had found employment. And so, with my heart full of sorrow and bitterness for the past, mingled with gratitude and blessings towards him who had thus helped me on my way, I said "Good-bye," for ever (though I knew it not at the time) to my dear Italy, and, leaving the white buildings of Genoa behind me, set out for the land of roast beef and fog!

Part II

PART II.

Continuation of the Narrative of Cesare Robaudi.

It was on a cold and wet October day that I first landed in England. I had left blue skies and warm sun behind me, in the land of my birth, and had come to where the heavens seemed to frown upon me, and the east winds blew continually. As I watched the busy throngs of people hurrying through the crowded streets, I realized, for the first time, the immense difficulty of my undertaking, and the overwhelming obstacles which lay in my path. For a few moments despair had me in its grip and I felt appalled at the hopelessness of the enterprise which I had set before me. How was I, poor and unknown as I was, to discover, alone and unaided, among the countless thousands of this city, the one man of whom I was in search, without a single clue to guide me on my way? Even had I been powerful and wealthy, and able to employ the most intelligent and highly trained members of the English police in the work, they might well have been baffled, and failed to trace home one whose very appearance, had I been confronted with him, I might, after seven years' separation, have been unable to swear to, even myself. But I never faltered in my design, and except during one or two brief periods of discouragement never really doubted my ultimate success. Sooner or later, I felt that it must come some day, and we should stand at last face to face, he and I.

My first object was to find some employment, so that I might not lack the means for pursuing my search; for though I had still the greater part of the sum with which my benefactor had provided me untouched, I had resolved that I would not farther draw upon it unless obliged. Some day I might need that and more besides.

I had not much difficulty in finding work to do, for I had been an expert at my trade, and one of those great establishments in the Tottenham Court Road were ready and willing to engage me, on trial, for the more elab-

orate and delicate branches of their cabinet work. They paid me good wages, too, so that I had no fear for the future; but I continued to live sparingly, and invariably put by the half of what I received.

I had been two years in England, and already began to speak the language fluently; but never yet had I met or heard of one Antonio Laroni, late of Genoa. All my time, after work was over, every Saturday afternoon and Sunday, and every hour that I could call my own, I devoted to the purpose I had always before me, and spent in wandering up and down the streets of the City, looking in the faces of every man I met; frequenting alike crowded highways, squalid lanes and fashionable thoroughfares. Every meal I took was eaten at some French or Italian restaurant, where I was most likely to meet with a compatriot, or someone who might possibly tell me of him I sought, and where he might be found. And after all I was not even sure that he was here, in England—in London—nor could I, as I have said before, even be sure of knowing him again if we did meet. Most probably he had assumed some other name than his own, and with it a disguise; and though I fancied he would scarcely deem it possible that I should come to search for him here, yet fear will make a man cautious and keen-sighted when there appears but slight necessity for it.

One thing, at least, I felt sure of, and that was, that he would not know me until I told him my name, for I still wore the ragged, grizzled beard I had acquired in prison, and that alone, without my grey hair and altered features, would have been a sufficient disguise. No, there was little chance of his recognizing me when I had not even recognized myself! How then could I be sure of his identity, for he might also be much changed?

For the second time a feeling of deep despondency came upon me which I found it hard to struggle against. Nearly two years had passed, and I had done nothing, and was no further forward than the day on which I first landed on the English shore. Another month passed, and one day as I took my noontide meal at a café to which I often resorted, I saw a face I knew. Not the one which I had sought so long and so ineffectually, but a familiar face, for all that, and one which I recognized instantly as belonging to a friend of former days, who had worked at the same trade, and sat at the same bench with me, before my

evil fate had overtaken me. I always sat at a table near the door, so as to command a view of all those who entered, and this man, Andrea Menotti, came and took a seat opposite to me. As soon as I could conquer my surprise and agitation,—for perhaps he might be able to tell me of *him* I was looking for—I rose from my seat, and leaving my scarcely tasted food, crossed over to him and greeted him by name.

He looked at me in astonishment which, when I whispered my name in his ear, was trebled, and became an amazement almost beyond words.

"Cesare Robaudi!" he repeated, incredulously, "who died in the prison of ——"

"No," I interrupted, "who did not die, unfortunately, it may be for some people."

"You mean?——" he began, looking at me curiously and hesitating.

"I give no name," I answered, cautiously; "at least, not here. But if you will come with me, I can give you proofs that I am indeed the man I claim to be," for I saw that he was still but half convinced as to my identity.

"But it is too wonderful," he murmured to himself, scanning my face and form doubtingly.

I stripped up one sleeve and showed him where, on the inner part of my arm, just below the elbow, there was a peculiar star-shaped scar.

"Do you remember this," I asked, "and how you made it by striking me accidentally with the point of your chisel?"

"Do I not!" he rejoined eagerly, now quite convinced. "And how you bled and bled, and your arm was bad for a long time afterwards."

He rung my hand violently, and I saw the tears standing in his eyes.

"Tell me all," he said. "How it is that you are alive and free, and here in this country?"

So I sat down by him and recounted, in a low voice, not wishing to be overheard, the story I had already told once, and only once—or, at least, such portions of it as I thought fit to communicate. By the time I had ended my recital he had finished his meal, though, in his interest and wonderment, he several times was on the point of thrusting his fork into his eye, for he seemed unable to remove his gaze from my face while I was speaking.

Occasionally he uttered ejaculations of pity and indignation; but it was not until we were in the street, outside the café, that I ventured to put the question that trembled on my lips.

"Can you tell me ought of Antonio Laroni, or where he is to be found?"

"Ah!" and he stopped short. "Why do you ask me that? Is it that you wish to pay the debt you owe him? Indeed, I do not blame you!"

Then in a husky voice, and clutching him by the arm so that he almost cried out, I asked, "Do you also say the same as the others? Was it then, indeed, my friend who betrayed me?"

My heart beat so loud and fast that I could scarcely hear my voice.

"I do not know who those others may be," he answered, with surprise, "or what they said; but if they declared that Laroni was a false hearted, cowardly traitor, they spoke truly, for he *did* betray you!"

The answer was not unexpected, or more than I had feared, but I could not refrain from uttering a groan as these words of condemnation passed his lips.

"Did you not know it?" he inquired, with considerable amazement. "Did you not mark his demeanour in the court of justice? —how he dared not meet your eye, and slunk away like a beaten hound when all was over? Did you not hear him recount all those idle words and foolish speeches, which he declared to have been spoken by you, and everything else, to your disadvantage? Did he say a single good word for you? And those incriminating papers, of which you vowed—and truthfully, too, I dare swear—that you knew nothing; who but he could have had access to, and placed them about your person, where they were sure to be found?" Menotti gave way to the wildest excitement, and his words poured out like a flood. "Did not every sentence he spoke add another link to your chains? And, above all, did he not marry Bianca Ferri as soon as you were safely disposed of?"

I bowed my head upon my breast in silence. True, true, too true, every word of it!

Then he continued, "And now you ask me where he is to be found; and, though you affect hardly to believe all that I say, I can see, when I look in your eyes, something lurking there which bodes ill to Antonio Laroni, and which, were I he, would make me prefer rather to meet a drove of hungry wolves than face Cesare Robaudi with the memory of his great wrongs upon him!"

"Is he here, then, in this country—in England?" I asked, fiercely.

"He is; but where you may find him I cannot tell you, for he

shuns all his compatriots. But I have seen him myself—once."

"Tell me where—where?" I asked, eagerly, with a devouring impatience.

A look of gravity, almost fear, passed across Menotti's face.

"Not here," he replied, in a whisper, looking round furtively, though there was no one near, and we had spoken throughout in our own language.

"Come to me here, to-night, and I will tell you what I know, though by doing so I put myself in peril;" and he thrust a piece of paper into my hand.

"How—what do you mean?" I inquired, surprised at his words, but more surprised at his manner. "Why cannot you tell me now? Why must I wait till to-night? I cannot! I will not. Why will you not tell me what I desire to know, at once?"

"Because I dare not," he answered, with all his excitement and impetuosity gone. "As it is, I put my life in your hands. You have waited many years; surely you can wait a few hours longer. Farewell!" And, as though fearing any further importunity on my part, he plunged down a narrow side street and disappeared.

It was striking eight by a church clock in the neighbourhood when I knocked at the door of a grim, dingy looking lodging-house in that part of London which goes by the name of Islington, and which was the address written upon the slip of paper given me by Menotti. He must have been expecting me, for, on knocking, it was he who opened to me and bade me enter and follow him up several flights of stairs to a room with a sloping roof, in which I could scarcely stand upright; with one window, out of which you could see nothing but the backs of other houses, all equally grimy and cheerless-looking. There were a few brightly-coloured prints of the saints on the walls, and over the bed was a crucifix. Evidently Menotti was still a good Catholic and uncontaminated by a sojourn in a country of heretics. As soon as I had entered, he locked the door and closed the window though the day had been sultry, and even now there was not a breath of air stirring, and the atmosphere of the room, close up under the roof, was almost stifling. Having done this, he next proceeded to detach the crucifix from the nail on which it hung, while I watched his movements with gradually increasing surprise.

"Swear," said he, holding the cross before me, "swear on this holy emblem, and by all your hopes of salvation, that you will not reveal what I am about to

impart to you, nor ever, by word or deed, betray the name of your informant; for, as sure as the heavens above, on the day that you do so, my life will be the forfeit!"

His words and the solemnity of his demeanour impressed me with a feeling of vague terror, but I took the oath, and kissing the crucifix, swore never to let his name pass my lips in connection with what he was about to reveal to me. Then, in a low voice, as though he indeed feared that the walls might have ears, he spoke again.

"You have heard of the Society of the Seven?"

I shuddered, and crossed myself, for, as I have before remarked, the dread Power to which he referred was not a thing to be mentioned lightly. It was an unknown but terrible and resistless Body, of which nothing more than the existence was known, or suspected, by the outside world. A Power which, having its headquarters in Italy, pervaded the whole of Europe, establishing its branches in every city, and making its influence felt by high and low alike. From the king upon his throne to the peasant in his hovel, none dared to brave its authority, nor might do so with impunity; for among its members were enrolled the highest and the lowest in the land; and when its fiat once went forth none dared disobey it. It had been—I quote from tradition—established originally for the purpose of delivering the oppressed from the oppressor, and helping those who lacked the power and the means to help themselves to resist tyranny and wrong, by banding themselves together into one community and fellowship, each individual member of which was pledged by an awful oath to assist in the work to the utmost of his power and to the last moment of his natural life. Nothing but death absolved the vow thus taken, and for every dereliction of duty or obedience, small or great, there was but one penalty and one punishment — death; a death from which there was no escape. This Power had, in the course of time, become so vast and swollen and impossible to control, by reason of the mystery in which it was involved, that no other, whether secular or ecclesiastical, could compete with it. It professed to deal out justice to all alike, and spare none. Its emissaries were often unknown, even to each other, and its headquarters and places of assembly remained undiscovered in spite of every effort and the immense sums of money which were offered from time to time by different

governments for information concerning the commission of various terrible acts of retribution, or so called justice, of a political or private nature, which had caused panic and confusion even in royal and imperial households.

All this passed rapidly through my mind as I heard Menotti declare that it was among the members of this dread community that I must search for Antonio Laroni, and though it was not the first time the idea had been presented to me, it was the first time that it had been done so forcibly and without the shadow of a doubt. Truly, the man who first informed me of Antonio's flight had said something to this effect, but I was weak and almost fainting at the time with hunger, fatigue, and misery, and had not grasped the full meaning of his words.

"How do you know this?" I asked, "and from whom is your information derived?"

His answer petrified me. "I also am one of them!" and, turning up his sleeve, he showed me on the bared arm near the shoulder the mark of a——

What that symbol was I dare not reveal, nor should I have dared to repeat a word of what passed between us at that interview had I not good reason to believe that Menotti died more than a year ago, the chief agent and victim of an explosion, which shook a throne and might have changed a dynasty.

There was silence between us during the space of some moments. Then Menotti spoke again.

"You see I have not hesitated to put my life in your hands for the sake of our old friendship, and for the furtherance of what I feel to be your just revenge, by thus speaking of the private concerns of the 'Society' to one of the uninitiated; but you have sworn——"

"Ay," I replied, fervently, "and I will abide by my oath, or may my soul be condemned to everlasting flames and my body rot in an unhallowed grave."

Then again after a while I asked him, "But for what purpose have you told me this thing?"

"That you may yourself become one of us, for only thus can you be sure of meeting the man you seek. Listen!" he continued, drawing nearer and speaking in rapid, earnest tones, "Laroni is suspected—only suspected, or he would not be alive at this same moment—and of what is not known, except by the superiors of our Order; but it *is* known to a few that he has given cause of late for suspicion to the heads of that branch of the Society to which he and I belong. He is, therefore, and

though completely unaware of the fact, under surveillance; for it is the custom of 'The Seven' to treat with a more than common show of confidence and benevolence those over whose heads there hangs the shadow of a doubt, that they may be thus thrown off their guard and the sooner hasten their doom. Throw in, then, your lot with ours, and so devote yourself to his undoing, and perchance be the very instrument of his destruction. Is not this a revenge after your own heart?"

"Will they accept me?" I asked, eagerly.

"Gladly, when they hear your history; and such a tale as you have to tell will help to pass you quickly into the highest Order—even the Order of 'The Devoted.'"

"Who are they?" I asked, struck by the awe which was evident in his tone and gesture.

"That I must not tell you now; indeed I fear lest you may have already excited suspicion by your visit, for we never know whether we are not ourselves objects of supervision. Go now,—to-morrow there is a meeting appointed, at which I must attend, when I will myself inscribe your name upon the Register of the Society, as one suitable for admission to the Order—that is, if you desire it."

I looked out of the window of the room in which we stood at the strip of blue sky which could be seen above the chimney pots, and thought of that other window, high up overhead, through which the sun's rays used to penetrate so feebly, even on the brightest and sunniest of summer days, and of the man who had worn out the best years of his life in that cold, dark, dreary dungeon, away from the light of day. I thought of my murdered mother, of Bianca, whose image, long obscured by sadder, fiercer memories, now flashed across my brain, radiant with all the beauty and charm of former days — of Bianca, whom, they said, her husband beat and shamefully ill-used!

Then I turned and faced him. "I do desire it."

I passed many feverish days in waiting for the summons which Menotti assured me would come. But one day at dusk, as I was leaving my work, a hand tapped me on the shoulder, and turning sharply round, I confronted a man whose face, from what little I could see of it between the turned up collar of his coat and the brim of his slouched hat, which came down well over his eyes, was quite unknown to me.

"Cesare Robaudi?" he demanded, rather than inquired.

"The same," I responded, briefly.

"To-morrow night you will be here, at the same hour, and I will lead you—you know where," and, before I had quite recovered myself from the effect of the surprise caused by his sudden appearance, he had vanished.

"At last!—at last!" I repeated to myself, and all the next day my shaking hand could scarcely hold the tools necessary to my employment.

Long before the time at which he had intimated I might expect him I was at the same spot waiting impatiently for my guide. I kept a keen watch upon the different street corners that he might not take me by surprise this time; but while I was still peering about me in the fast gathering gloom, I suddenly felt again the peremptory touch upon my shoulder, and, turning quickly round—there was the same figure of the night before, with muffled face, and eyes steadfastly observing me from under the shadow thrown by the brim of his hat.

"You are ready? It is well. Come, and be silent," and, without another word, he passed one arm through mine and lead me, avoiding the chief and more crowded thoroughfares, through many streets and courts and narrow, intersecting lanes showing a remarkable knowledge of the locality, until we must have gone some two miles. Finally we found ourselves in a narrow, unfrequented street, the name of which I did not notice at the time, in what was, to me, a totally unknown neighbourhood, on either side of which were lofty, but dreary and dilapidated looking dwellings, for the most part let out in lodgings, and in the dusty window panes of which were cards announcing the different trades and callings pursued within. We went on to the end, where there was a high brick wall, forming apparently a *cul-de-sac*, and for the first time I ventured to put a question to my mute companion.

"Are we almost there?" I inquired.

He bent his head, and, taking a firmer hold of my arm, we passed through the low, dark entry of a court in the angle of the said wall, at one extremity of which there was a faint light showing, for it was now quite dark, as we were getting towards the end of September. He guided me carefully across the rough, uneven pavement to the house, from one of whose lower windows the light shone, then, with his other hand, he tapped lightly seven times upon one of the upper panels of the door, which thereupon opened imme-

diately, and as though of its own accord.

"Enter," he said, directing me across the threshold, while the door immediately clapped to behind us, leaving us in utter darkness. Then a voice, speaking almost in my ear, though I saw and felt no one, asked, "Who comes?" To which my companion answered, "A brother, and with him a son of affliction." The reply then came, "Pass on, brother, in the name of 'The Seven!'" In a second a dazzling light was cast upon us from above, and I saw that we stood in a long narrow passage, at the end of which was a steep flight of stone steps, dimly lighted by a lamp in a niche of the wall, half way down. Another staircase led apparently to the upper part of the house. At the bottom of the first flight of steps, which we descended, was a heavy iron-clamped door, on which my guide again gave seven low but distinct taps, waiting a certain time between each. This door, swinging back upon its hinges, admitted us into a long, low, vault-like chamber, the roof of which was supported by four massive stone columns, and insufficiently lighted by candles stuck in iron sconces round the walls. At the further end of the apartment was a black curtain, which, suspended between two of the aforesaid columns, cut off the upper part of the chamber; and before this curtain a man stood, as though on guard, bearing on his shoulder the old Roman emblems of power and punishment, the fasces and axe. There were about a score or two of others standing listlessly about in silent groups, most of whom wore under their coats a tricoloured scarf of blue, red, and black, crossing the breast from right to left. I looked at my companion and saw that a similar token was now visible beneath his own outer garment. I scanned the faces of those present, but without recognizing among them the familiar one of Andrea Menotti. He was apparently not there, and neither—unless I was much mistaken in my judgment—was Antonio Laroni. Making allowance for every possible alteration which might have taken place in the outward aspect of my old comrade, there was not one present of whom I could say in my heart, "This may be he." The man who had brought me to the place touched me lightly on the arm. "The Grand Master is here," he said briefly, motioning to where the before mentioned individual stood on guard with the axe protruding from the bundle of sticks, and again relapsed into silence. A chill sensation of fear, of doubt and

dismay, fell upon me as my eye took in the details of the gloomy scene—the ill-lighted dungeon-like chamber and the groups of silent, sullen looking individuals who stood there waiting. For a moment I felt that I would have given all that I possessed to have found myself once more in the open air, away from this atmosphere of depression and mystery, which seemed to hang about me like a pall; but my original companion and escort kept still close beside me, making any attempt at escape impossible. Then from behind the curtain there came the sound of the single stroke of a bell. The man with the fasces and axe drew back the heavy, sombre drapery and exposed to view the hitherto concealed upper portion of the apartment, in the centre of which stood the trunk of a large tree. On this rude table, or altar, were laid an axe and crucifix, and behind it stood a man wearing a long cassock-shaped garment with a cowl attached, which concealed all his face except a pair of piercing eyes and a long white beard. All those present hastened to group themselves in a semicircle before the rude altar of wood, while I took my station half concealed behind one of the massive columns which formed the recess. As I did so, I saw that in the farthest corner, lighted by a hanging lamp, was a complete human skeleton, having a crown and sword lying at its feet.

The Grand Master, for it was he who wore the cowl, struck the block of wood with the axe, and said, "In the name of 'The Seven'!" To which all those present responded by raising their hands in salutation to their foreheads and then folding their arms across their breasts. Then came the question, "Are the doors closed?" and the answer from one and all, "The doors are closed."

"Is everything in due order?"

"It is."

"To what is this assembly devoted?"

"To the threefold aims of the wise—truth, freedom, and virtue.'

"Are the initiated only present?"

There was no answer to this; but I felt the eyes of all present turned upon me as I shrunk behind my sheltering pillar.

The voice came again, "Let the stranger who seeks admittance to the Brotherhood stand forth!"

As I still lingered, loth to quit my obscure position, I felt myself grasped by the arm by my conductor and forcibly drawn forward until I stood foremost of all, within the semicircle, and felt the full penetrating power of

those calm, relentless eyes turned upon me.

"Cesare Robaudi, whose name has been inscribed upon the Register of our holy Order as one fit and proper—as the victim of tyranny and injustice — to be admitted a member of our universal Brotherhood and Society of 'The Seven,' which was instituted in the remote ages for the safety, preservation, and regeneration of man, state your reasons and claims for desiring admittance." The Grand Master spoke throughout in the English tongue, but with an accent which betrayed him to be of foreign birth, though what name he bore or to what country, kindred, or religion he laid claim, was not known. I speak, of course, by the light of my later knowledge and experience. He was the head of the English branch of the Society, and, as such, his authority was unquestioned, and he was answerable for his actions only to the Supreme Council of the Seven, the members of which Body were known to none save the Grand Masters of the various European branches. He was by Them invested with the power of conferring life or death, and his identity and movements were, except to the members of the Highest Grade, or Circle, as it was called—enveloped in a haze of mystery and awe.

Seeing that words still failed me, and my trembling lips refused to give the answer required of them, he continued, "Whosoever does not close his ears to the cry of the miserable, or his heart to pity of the unfortunate; whosoever is firm in adversity, undaunted in difficulties; who has a soul susceptible of great designs; who is above all base motives, and despises the approbation of the multitude—is alone worthy of admission to our Order. Are you, Cesare Robaudi, prepared to take upon you the Oath of obedience and submission prior to entering the Probationary Degree, as a novitiate?"

I answered firmly enough, for my fleeting courage had come back to me as he was speaking, "I am."

"Kneel, then, and swear upon this crucifix, and before the assembled brethren, to keep the Oath I now impose upon you."

I knelt and repeated the following words after him:—

"I bind myself never to reveal by hint, word, deed, or writing to my most trusted friend, or the mother who bore me, anything that shall be said or done, even if it be contrary to my religion or my country; and I will oppose with all my might the enemies of the human race, be they king or kaiser. I bind myself to perpetual silence, to unshaken loy-

alty and submission to my Order, and here make complete surrender of my individual judgment and my own will. I pledge myself to serve the Brotherhood with my fortune, my honour, and my blood. I subject myself to whatever reproofs, or punishments, my superiors shall enjoin. Their friends and enemies shall be my friends and enemies, and I swear to spare neither substance nor soul to conquer or die for the right."

An exceeding awe fell upon me as I recorded this tremendous vow, and when I was permitted to rise, after kissing the crucifix, and the blade of the axe, I was unable to do so unaided. He who had acted as my guide again came to my assistance, and was the first to greet me, as a member of the Society, though of an inferior grade, by bestowing upon me the grip of the Brotherhood; which consisted of pressing with the middle and fore-fingers upon the right thumb and wrist. Afterwards all the other members present welcomed me in the same manner. Then the Grand Master pronounced in sonorous tones the words, "Retire in Peace!" The curtain fell once more into its place; the man with the fasces and axe resumed his station, and the meeting was dissolved.

I had not seen Menotti at all during the whole of these proceedings, therefore was the more surprised when, on once more finding myself in the street—having been escorted thither again by my original companion, who quitted me with a brief "Good night"—to feel a touch on my arm, and, turning round, find myself confronting him.

"You were there, after all, then!" I exclaimed. "How was it I did not see you?" He smiled faintly, and laid his finger upon his lip, as though forbidding further questions. We then proceeded in silence, while I reflected on these matters, until we had reached the end of the street, and I felt I could breathe more freely.

"Then *he* was not there," I said, conscious that he would know to whom I referred.

"No," he replied, cautiously; "and that was well, for then he would have heard your name and been warned in time. But you must meet soon, and then you will know him; but he will not recognize you, and you can please yourself as to making him aware of your identity."

"He shall know it all in good time; and in the moment that I reveal myself to him I shall also know the truth!"

Menotti looked at me, half-pityingly, half-contemptuously, and replied, "You know it al-

ready, and though you may affect to doubt it, you cannot deceive me, still less yourself."

The next few months were devoted to learning the various duties which devolved upon me, but which I need not further enter into here.

From time to time I received summons to attend different meetings and ceremonials of the Order, at some of which the Grand Master would himself be present, but only if there was important business to transact or a new member to be initiated, which last happened but seldom —in fact, I remember but two such instances occurring in my own experience—while at others, his place would be taken by an inferior magnate, or a member of the Highest Circle, as the various degrees were termed.

I was beginning to lose some of the awe which the mysteries and ceremonies—instituted in other and darker ages and still religiously preserved and practised—had first occasioned in me. My demeanour, together with what was known of my past life and sufferings—and there was nothing hidden from the knowledge of the Superiors of the Order—had, it appeared, favourably impressed some of the higher functionaries, including the Grand Master himself. Thus I passed in a few weeks from the "Probationary Degree" to the "Secondary," or "Symbolical," and had already received a notification to prepare myself for still further promotion to the Third, or "Superior" Circle, which comprised the chief strength of the fraternity, and which would involve the taking upon me of additional vows and the passing of a severer ordeal.

Still, I had not yet met with Antonio Laroni. At every assembly I scanned eagerly the faces of all those present, but never in one was I able to trace the familiar lineaments I looked for. Most of those whom I met on these occasions were apparently of my own nation. One or two might have been French by birth, some few were of Russian or Polish extraction, and there was also a small number of sullen, discontented Englishmen, mostly of the lower middle class; but conversation between the brethren was not allowed, and, except when engaged upon the affairs of the Society, the most rigid silence was preserved. I seldom failed to meet with Andrea Menotti after the meeting was dissolved, and to him, when it was safe to do so, and we were alone, I poured out my rage and disappointment at being thus continually baffled by circumstances. Once he told me that, by means

of cautious inquiries, he had ascertained that Laroni had been sent out of the country on business connected with the Brotherhood, but must inevitably return shortly. Meanwhile I fumed and fretted, and consumed my soul in impotent longings for that day, which seemed so long in coming, when we two should meet face to face.

One day the summons came for me to attend, at the usual place and hour, for initiation into those higher Mysteries which had been promised me. Again I trod that now familiar way until I reached that quiet, unsuspicious looking court, with its entrance in the angle of the high, blank wall. I gave the customary signal and pass-word, and was admitted as usual; but scarcely had my foot crossed the threshold, when a thick cloth was thrown over my head from behind, bandaging my eyes; my arms were lightly pinioned; and before I could cry out in alarm, I was hurried by unseen guides —where, I knew not. I could tell that we were ascending, and not descending the staircase this time; but knowing that in any case remonstrance would be useless, I suffered them to lead me whither they would. Once I was warned to bow my head as we passed through a doorway; then came more flights of stairs, and finally a voice, which said, "Remove the bandage!" And that being done, I saw that I was in a small octagon-shaped room, in the presence of three other men, one of whom I recognized, by his long white beard and wonderful eyes, as the Grand Master. The other two, whom I knew not, wore each a crimson girdle, from which depended a dagger in its sheath. The apartment, which was panelled in some dark wood and had no window or door, or any perceptable means of egress, was lighted from the roof by an iron lamp hanging from a chain. In the centre of the room was a table covered by a black cloth, which hung to the floor, on which stood a small brazier. Behind this stood the Grand Master in his black shrouding cassock and cowl, and to the right and left of him were the two personages with the blood-red girdles, whose features wore in each case the imprint of a cruel and relentless fanaticism and a stern, impenetrable resolution. Again that Oath I had previously taken was propounded to me, and a violent trembling came upon me as I invoked upon my head the wrath of God, the abhorrence of man, and the eternal infamy of the perjured if ever I betrayed my Order.

Then, in obedience to a command, I bared my left arm to

the shoulder. I saw one of the two unknown bend over the brazier, from which he took some instrument, and approach me. I felt a sudden, intolerable, scorching pain as the red-hot metal burnt its way deep into my flesh, and I received from the branding-iron the mark which I shall bear until my body becomes a prey for corruption, and which sealed me irrevocably Theirs!

I had now attained the right to assume the tri-coloured scarf of blue, red, and black, and was admitted into full fellowship with the members of my own Circle. A soothing ointment was applied to my smarting limb, the bandage was replaced, and I was re-conducted with equal caution back again to my starting point, when I was left free to proceed to the Hall of Assembly, which I have before described.

There was the customary sentinel on duty at the entrance, who on this particular occasion proved to be Andrea Menotti. My arm was paining me intensely, but in a second I had forgotten it, and every other matter in the world, but one, for as I passed him, giving and receiving the ordinary salutation, he added to it three other words in a barely audible whisper:—

"He is here!"

There was no need to tell me more, or add another syllable, for there was but one individual whose presence meant anything to me now, and Menotti knew it. My heart beat to suffocation, and it seemed to me that everyone must note my agitation, but all were seemingly engaged in their own concerns, or listlessly awaiting the commencement of the business which had necessitated their attendance. One by one I examined the faces, some of them now well known, of those present. My eyes travelled slowly over the features of those nearest to me, passing from one to another until—I saw him! He was altered—much altered, but I knew him directly—at once, without a moment's hesitation or doubt. He was standing leaning against one of the massive columns which supported the roof, plunged in deep thought, and apparent perplexity, for as he pondered deeply, he gnawed with restless energy at his finger nails. Ha! Antonio, my friend, that old habit of yours, when vexed or disappointed, had not yet been conquered; and surely the years which have lagged so heavily for me have not passed lightly over your own head, to judge by the haggard, gloomy, deeply lined countenance which I saw opposite to me. Was it remorse, or an evil conscience, or simply the result of the trials and troubles of this mortal life?

My violent emotion left me; my heart ceased its wild throbbing; and a great calm fell upon me. To think that at last we had met! The unconscious magnetism of my gaze caused its object to look up: and, looking up, he saw my eyes fixed steadfastly upon him. He returned my look, at first half sullenly, half absently, for his mind was evidently still occupied with other thoughts. By what right did I, a stranger to him, venture thus curiously and intently to regard him? Gradually, though, into the sombre eyes which encountered mine, there crept a look of vague and wordless fear. I saw it, and triumphed, and still held him in the power of my glance. It increased and spread. I saw the colour recede from his cheeks and a livid pallor encircle his twitching mouth, and spread from thence, by degrees, over the rest of his face. Then drops of perspiration made their appearance upon his brow, and I knew that a great and formless horror had him in its grasp, and I also knew that Antonio Laroni was indeed the black hearted traitor who had betrayed me. Presently I removed my gaze from him, and suffered it to roam idly over the forms and faces of the others present, and as I did so I almost fancied that I heard the gasp of relief which he gave. It was not, it could not be, that he knew me; that was hardly possible. But there was that in my fixed and remorseless look that stirred his guilty soul to its black depths, and perhaps brought to him the memory of him whom he had voluntarily consigned to a living death, for it was the look of *one who knew*. When I looked again, I found that he had moved from his original position, and was engaged in whispering eagerly into the ear of one of the brethren, who glanced at me and shook his head. Evidently, he was seeking information concerning me, as to who I was or whence I came. Afterwards, I saw him going from one to another of those present in a like manner, most of whom shrugged their shoulders or shook their heads in answer to his questions; being either unwilling or unable to give him the information he desired. For I discovered that even here, and by the members of his own Circle, Antonio Laroni was both hated and distrusted.

Then the stroke of the bell, from behind the curtain, announced that proceedings were about to begin, and all individual concerns, whether of life or death, must give way before the affairs of the Society. But during the whole of the next two hours or so that followed, I never re-

moved my eyes from Laroni for longer than a few seconds at a time, and the acute pain which my burn still caused me was, I felt, nothing beside the torture which my steady, relentless scrutiny was to him. Heaven alone knew what other dark secrets were hidden in his guilty soul besides that one which was known to me—whether against individuals or the Order to which he belonged—whereby he might have imperilled his safety; but it was not unlikely that one who had once betrayed the innocent blood would add to, and perhaps repeat, his original crime. I thought of my mother hiding herself to die, all through this man's machinations; and as he writhed beneath my unwavering glance, I felt a thrill of joy pass through me, such as I had not hoped ever to feel again; and I almost laughed aloud as I leaned against the wall with folded arms, forgetting the smart of my wound and everything but my anticipated revenge. The meeting was dissolved, and he, Antonio, hurried away, but not, as he thought, unobserved, for I was close behind him as he quitted the court, and touched him lightly on the shoulder. He started as if shot, and, turning round, asked in a voice that would fain have been fierce, but which not the greatest effort of his will could keep steady or free from the taint of fear, who I was and what was my business with him? We were standing in the shadow of the high blank wall and farthest removed from the light of the one feeble gas lamp which was considered by the authorities sufficient illumination for the little frequented by-street, in which the entrance to our head-quarters was judiciously situated. I had also partly muffled my face, so that nothing beyond my eyes could have been visible in the darkness. These I had fastened upon him, holding him in their power like a wild beast ready, but afraid, to spring.

"Who are you?" he asked again, with a little more confidence, seeing that I did not answer his first question. "Who are you, who thus dare to dog my footsteps?" Unconsciously he had relapsed into his native tongue, and I replied to him in the same.

"Who am I, Antonio Laroni?" I answered, revelling in the perturbation which my obvious acquaintance with his name caused him to show so plainly.

I accordingly repeated the phrase, "Who am I, Antonio Laroni, formerly of the city of Genoa? Who am I, you ask? That is of little importance so long as I know who you are.

You saw me at the meeting and I saw you, too, Antonio, my friend. I saw you, yes."

Then with an attempt at bravado, which but ill accorded with his quivering voice, he exclaimed, "In the Devil's name, who are you, and how do you know me? Doubtless," with a hoarse laugh, "you are a spy. If so, I have only to—"

"Not so fast, friend," I answered. "Whether I am a spy or not is of less consequence than the fact that I am the bearer of a message to you."

"A message!" he rejoined, with affected carelessness. "Is that so? Then deliver it, and go your way."

"It is a message," I said, slowly, gradually lowering my voice, and drawing nearer, so that the concluding words of the sentence were whispered close to his ear, "from an old friend, a very old friend, and one whom you have not met for many years, but who remembers you all the same. It is, in fact, a message from your old friend, Cesare Robaudi!"

Even in the darkness I was aware of the alteration in his countenance as I uttered this (my own) name. His jaw dropped like that of a dead man, and a tremor ran through his whole frame and shook his limbs as though a sudden ague had fallen upon him. He stood as though rooted to the ground, and, for the first time for many years, I laughed softly to myself as I drank in all these outward and visible signs of his terror. And yet Antonio Laroni had not been wont to be a coward in the old days.

"You do not ask me what the message is that Cesare sends you," I continued, mocking him; "but perhaps, it may be, you guess it already?"

"You lie!" he gasped; "you lie!—there is no message. If there were, what should I care? I do not know the man of whom you speak."

"Come, come, my friend," I said, "say not so. Cesare would be grieved could he hear you. Is it thus that you would treat an old companion?"

"Curse you!" he muttered, and I knew that he clenched his hands as he spoke. "Can you not say what you have to say and go? Give me your message, whatever it may be, though it is nothing to me. And I tell you again—do you hear?—that I do not know this man, this Robaudi, of whom you speak."

I shrugged my shoulders lightly, and smiled in his face, as I continued as though I had not heard him, "Cesare's message which he sends you through me, for he is an honourable man, and would not willingly owe aught to

anyone, is, that he 'will yet repay the debt he owes you, sevenfold.'"

Then, without waiting for any reply, of which he seemed, for the moment, incapable, I turned away and left him. Once, on reaching the end of the street, I looked back. I saw a black object faintly outlined against the dark background of the dead wall, and knew that he was still there, where I had left him. I do not know what prompted me to thus disguise my identity from him, except that it was the sudden impulse of the moment, and that thereby I seemed to see a means by which I might considerably prolong the torture I purposed to inflict upon him before I had done. I took an early opportunity of informing my ally, Menotti, of what had passed between us, and also of consulting with him as to what he thought would be my enemy's next move. He shook his head and asked,

"And do you think, then, he did not know you?"

"That I cannot say; he may, or may not, have done so. But though I do not think that he suspects me, I am sure of one thing, which is, that he fears me; and he shall fear me yet more before the end comes!"

Menotti laid his hand upon my arm.

"My friend," he said, solemnly, "I know not what you intend to do in this case—only that you have suffered much; but before you proceed farther, will you not pause and reflect?"

"Pause!" I exclaimed, angrily, "pause in the execution of my fondly planned and long contemplated design? Never! Reflect!" and I laughed bitterly. "Have I not had ample time for reflection? What other occupation had I for seven long uninterrupted years but reflection? Have you, too, turned against me?"

"No, no, Cesare," he cried, impulsively, "do not speak thus, I implore you! You wrong me. Indeed, it was only of your own good, of your eternal welfare that I considered when—"

"You are a good Catholic, Andrea?" I asked.

"Who dares to doubt it?" he replied, crossing himself with much piety and fervour.

"Then, would you have me break my oath, sworn upon the blessed cross, and let the murderer—for so I always call him—of my mother go free!"

The vehemence and passion with which I spoke infected him also, and, grasping my hand, he exclaimed—

"I will no longer seek to turn you from your purpose, whatever it may be; but beware yourself of Antonio and do not go unarmed."

I laughed scornfully. Indeed, I was becoming quite merry of late.

"That the villain will, in all probability, attempt my life, I do not for a moment doubt; nor that he will fail in his attempt, however or wherever he may make it—and yet you would have me spare him."

Menotti shook his head and raised his hands in deprecation.

"Andrea Menotti, I know that I have not escaped imprisonment and disease, bereavement and beggary and death in a dozen forms, to die like a dog at his hands. Until I have taken his life for a prey, I feel —why I cannot tell you, I only know it is so—that my own will not be forfeited. But I intend that my revenge shall be slow and sure, and existence become for him a very hell upon earth before I finally deprive him of it."

I saw Menotti turn pale and shudder at my words and the ferocity with which I pronounced them.

"Yes, yes," he answered; "and at first I felt like you when you told me of the treatment you had received at his hands, but it seems to me now that he may have suffered, too, in another way, and that his own conscience has been your avenger. That, at least, is how I read his face last night by the aid of the key with which you had supplied me."

This had been my own thought at the time, but so far from causing any compassion to arise in my breast, the remembrance of it only spurred me on in my undertaking.

"Tell me," I asked, after a brief silence between us, "what you meant when you told me months ago that Laroni was suspected of unfaithfulness to his Order?"

"Ah," he said, "it is true there were faint whispers to that effect, and for some time Laroni appeared to be in bad odour, but they seem to have passed away, and I have heard nothing further as to whether he has succeeded in clearing himself, or whether the original rumour was false. But whoever is once suspected, however slightly or unjustly, is ever afterwards an object of distrust to his Superiors and Associates. If you want to know my own opinion in the matter it is that Laroni would do anything in the world for money—even betray the Order to which he belongs, notwithstanding the fearful penalty he would incur by so doing—were the amount sufficient to take him safely out of the country afterwards, for the discovery of his treachery would be the signal for the signing of his death warrant;

and even then there is hardly any spot of the habitable world where 'Their' vengeance would not reach and overtake him."

I did not answer Menotti, for while he was speaking there had flashed across my mind a plot which, for devilish ingenuity could scarcely be surpassed, whereby I might compass his destruction. I longed to be alone that I might ponder over it and arrange my method of proceeding.

"Adieu, my friend," I said; "may all the saints protect you, but I have work to do and must therefore leave you."

He looked at me in amazement as I uttered these words in a tone of sudden and, to him, inexplicable exultation. Did he think I had at last gone mad, I wonder? I would not pause to explain myself further, but, hugging my secret in my breast, I parted from him and took my way homeward, to my poor, solitary little chamber, high up on the third storey of that dingy, cheerless lodging-house, chuckling to myself as I went.

It was a rare design that I nourished in my heart, but one which needed careful consideration in its development; but I was prepared to give it that and spare neither time nor money to carry it to a successful issue. I first of all had to discover where Laroni lived, and this I did by tracking him carefully home, after the next meeting, which we both were summoned to attend.

How he hated me already! Once, however, in the course of the evening he summoned up sufficient courage to approach me as I stood watching him through my half closed eyelids.

"Then he is still in prison?" he inquired, without any preliminary, and as though the words were forced from him against his will.

"He?" I repeated after him, with an affectation of forgetfulness, though all the time it took the utmost effort of my will to keep me from springing at his throat and choking the life out of him. "Oh, you mean, I suppose, our mutual friend, Cesare? Your mind it still running upon him, then, though you declared, more than once, too, like Peter, that you did not know the man! Do you hear the cock crow?"

I stopped and laughed softly to myself, while he glared at me like a maniac.

"No!" I continued, when my mirth had subsided, "he is not in prison now, and even hopes to visit England, himself, shortly, and renew his old friendship with you. Was it—if I may be allowed to ask the question—

was it the news of the prospect of his release which caused you to quit Genoa so hurriedly some two years and half ago?"

He gave me a look of hatred and fear, perfectly indescribable, his fingers twitched, his lips moved, but no sound came from them; and, with a light laugh, I moved away and left him there, muttering inaudible curses and invoking every possible ill upon my head. It was after this meeting that I traced him home to his abode, in a street leading out of Leicester Square. My next action was to draw out from the Bank, in which I had deposited them, my savings of the last two years and more, so that I might have the money in readiness. I had all this time been receiving good wages, and living frugally, consequently, the sum amounted to a little over £150, all of which I purposed, ungrudgingly, to devote to the furtherance of my contemplated scheme. My spare moments now were all spent in dogging the footsteps of Antonio Laroni. I found out all his haunts and pursued him from one to the other, and from place to place, like a shadow of evil. Wherever he went I followed close behind him; so that whenever he looked up, his eyes encountered mine fixed upon him and watching every movement. I knew the restaurants where he resorted to take his meals; and as surely as he sat down to eat he would find me opposite to him, or at his shoulder, watching every mouthful he took; so that the food choked him, and he would often leave his meal untasted and rush into the street, uttering blasphemies, in his fear and fury. It was of no use that he changed his habits or resorts, for I hunted him from place to place without experiencing either fatigue or compassion; and the more misery I caused him the gayer I became. I rubbed my hands together in exquisite satisfaction as he shrunk from my eye as though it would blast him; and hummed fragments of bacarolles and tarantellas as he slunk away from my presence, as though it were an embodied pestilence. I never spoke to him, so that he had no visible cause of complaint against me, beyond that of my perpetual and hated society. And I did this, and put myself to this needless trouble, partly because his torment was my delight, and partly because I feared lest he should, by any possibility, escape me before I was ready to strike the final blow. All this time, I repeat, I never interfered with him, or threatened him, or did ought but watch him and laugh noiselessly to myself; until the skin

began to hang loosely upon his bones and his eyes became heavy and blood-shot, by reason of the continual state of disquietude and fear in which he existed. He must always, too, when summoned, attend the meetings of the Society, which made it impossible for him to elude me without incurring "Their" wrath, and he knew it. He could not flee from the one without incurring the charge of infidelity to the other; and as—as I had also discovered—his sole means of support were derived from his office in connection with the Brotherhood, to whom he acted as a species of paid spy, or informer, and was consequently hated and despised by all who knew it—he would thus have cut himself off from his one source of livelihood. I think, at this time, I must have become a very fiend; my whole nature seemed to change, and I hunted down my prey with the relentless and insatiable hatred and ferocity of a Red Indian.

One night I had a strange, mysterious dream — a dream which haunted me for many days. I thought that I was a boy again—a barefooted, curly headed, happy hearted lad—with skin as brown as a berry, eyes that danced with glee, and limbs which seemed as though they never could be still; a boy who must be always laughing or dancing or singing, and who did not believe that there could be such a thing as trouble in the world, so long as there were plenty of chestnuts to eat, and one could lie all day in the sun. And I thought—in my dream—that Antonio was young, too, and that we both played together as we used in those old, beautiful days, so very long ago, when there was no falsehood and no thought of wrong in our hearts—nothing but love towards each other. I thought that we were gathering flowers and picking berries by the wayside—always sharing what was fairest and ripest—and our arms were round each other's shoulders. I seemed to feel the glorious, golden, Italian sunshine pouring full down upon my uncovered head, filling me with life and joy and vigour as I ran and frolicked and revelled in the beautiful world around me. The blood seemed to run riot in my veins, instead of creeping slowly and sluggishly—I was a boy again, and Antonio was my cherished companion and bosom friend; there was not a thought in my heart that I kept back from him.

And I thought that, as we rambled on and on, trampling the starry blossoms of the narcissus under our feet, there suddenly

appeared in the broad expanse of blue sky over our heads a little cloud "like a man's hand." And as I looked, it deepened and broadened and became denser and darker, so that it overshadowed us with a pall as we stood speechlessly gazing at it in awe and wonder, marvelling what it could mean. I felt an unutterable fear fall upon me. A chilly terror filled my heart, and a trembling arose in my limbs as the cloud, descending slowly and slowly, gradually enveloped us in its dark and clammy folds. I put out my hand to touch my friend.

"Keep close to my side, 'Tonio!" I cried, "for I'm horribly afraid—do not leave me, I pray!"

But he was gone—spirited away, and as I called upon his name in anguish and dismay, I heard his voice answering me out of the cloud,

"Good-bye, Cesare! Farewell, *amico mio;* we meet again at the end of the journey!"

I groped vainly in the darkness, and tried to discover the direction from which the voice came, that I might follow and find him; and when I could not do so, I cried aloud again in agony and grief,

"Come back to me! come back to me again, Antonio; do not leave me thus, I beseech you!"

And again the voice of my friend answered me, but this time it seemed to me to be very, very far off, "Good-bye! good-bye, Cesare; we meet again at the end of the journey!—the end of the journey!"

The voice trailed away and was lost in the distance.

Then I threw myself on my face, and wept long and bitterly for the dear companion I had lost, until I awoke to find my face wet with the tears I had shed in my dream.

But while I wondered what this could mean—for we Italians are a superstitious race, who believe in visions from above, and forewarning of things to come, and receive them devoutly—I fell asleep again, and again I dreamed a dream.

This time I thought I was travelling with my bare feet along a broad, white road, which led towards the setting sun—a road which seemed to go on and on without an end, and on which there was no other traveller save myself alone. I thought, too, that I was seeking someone, someone who was many weary miles ahead of me. Why I sought him I knew not; but come what might, I must seek until I found him. And as I mused in my heart as to how I was to accomplish my quest, a

voice, which came I knew not whence, spoke to me and said, "Follow the footprints!" And when I cast my eyes upon the ground, I saw that there were footprints on the road before me, footprints as far as my eye could reach, and they were all red like blood, as though the feet which had left the marks behind them had trodden in blood to the ankle. Then, as I looked at them in horror and amazement, I saw that the prints made by my own feet were red, too, and as I journeyed on and on—I ever left a blood-red track behind me on the whiteness of the road.

And the two tracks went on side by side, side by side, always close together, but never inter-mingling, until at last I asked myself, wondering and afraid, "What will happen when the two footprints meet at the end of the journey?"

And the voice coming from I knew not where, answered, "One will be blotted out and only one remain!" And, with these words in my ears, I woke for the second time.

This time there was a sense of exultation in my heart as I recalled to mind my second dream. What did it mean? What could it mean but that my plan of vengeance, my cherished vengeance had received sanction, and, therefore, must succeed?

Whose could those bloody footprints be which went ever before me, and which I must follow to the end of the journey, but those of the black-hearted traitor, Antonio Laroni? Had he not, indeed, dipped his feet in blood, wrung from my very heart? And the voice had said,

"When the two tracks meet one shall be blotted out and only one remain!" Surely there could be but one interpretation to this, and that one favourable to my purpose?

I became quite cheerful about this time as I watched the plan I had conceived unfolding itself and advancing slowly towards completion, and as I went about my daily work—the work which brought in the money that I hoarded so carefully, I hummed snatches of airs such as I had been used to chant in those other days.

Strange to say, this new behaviour of mine did not appear to please those who worked with me at the same trade. I had never been popular with my fellow-workmen in this new country; partly because I was of foreign birth and not one of themselves; partly because I was a silent, gloomy man, who wished neither to speak nor to be spoken to, only to be left

alone, and who never joined in their amusements, which seemed so barbarous in my eyes; but chiefly it was, I think, because I never drank the beer which they loved so much and swallowed in vast quantities morning, noon and night. And yet, as I was saying, when I began to smile to myself over my employment, and talk to myself in my own tongue as I worked, they seemed to regard me with less favour than ever, and withdrew themselves as far as possible from me as though they were half afraid of me.

This only made me smile the more; when there is no one left on earth to love you the next best thing is to be feared. Let one man at least fear me, and I was content, for the rest I cared not a jot. And yet sometimes, when I felt how utterly alone I was, I would have given anything to have had someone belonging to me—someone for whom I might have toiled and thought the labour light—someone who would have parted from me with regret, and met me on my return with gladness!

If my mother had only lived, how happy we might have been—or if Bianca had been true to to me! But one was not, and the other, even if living, was lost to me for ever!

Then, shutting my eyes, I tried to raise up in my mind the face and figure of my betrothed as I had last seen them. Was she tall or short? Strange to say, I had never considered this before, or thought of her as being either the one thing or the other. She had always appeared to me to be just perfect, so that you could not have wished anything about her otherwise; neither have added nor taken away an inch from her stature, nor altered a single feature in her face. Such a lovely face! full of health and hope and beauty; indeed, I know that she had never known a day's sickness up to the hour we parted. I remembered the massive braids of hair framing each soft rounded cheek; the brilliant hued handkerchief so tastefully arranged upon her head; the heavy gold earrings, and the amber necklace which had been her mother's and her mother's mother's, and, above all, those glorious dark eyes, which changed their expression twenty times a minute, and were now soft and languishing, now full of disdain, now flashing with fire, and now sparkling with coquetry. I remembered, too, the upward sweep of the thick, dark eye-lashes and the jet-black curve of the eyebrows—all, I recalled them all.

Some people, I know, had

thought Nina, the daughter of old Tomaso Mardoni, the carver in ivory, the belle of the quarter, and for those who cared for bright blue eyes, fluffy yellow hair, and pink and white cheeks she was well enough; but to my mind the olive skin and heavy masses of blue-black hair which grew low upon Bianca's forehead, were far beyond little Nina's foolish prettiness.

What had become of all that magnificent beauty now? Had she still retained it in spite of the hard times, hard fare, hard words, and, if the truth had been told, hard blows, which they said had been her portion; or had she faded early, as many of our women do, and become old while she was still young? Or, what was perhaps a better fate, was she too lying in her lonely, neglected grave, like my old mother?

I almost hoped that this might be so—it left my path clearer. Her prayers and tears might have stayed my hand—I say they *might*, I do not say they *would*, nor do I think it. I had only to remember what I never long forgot—the manner of my mother's death, how she had hid herself and crept away to die; too proud to let anyone see her sufferings—and, saints above! how she must have suffered before the end!

She was old and feeble—pray Heaven that death was not long in coming! And there was no mass offered for the repose of her soul! Oh! it was cruel, cruel! And she had been always such a good Catholic, observing every feast and keeping each fast ordained by her Church and then to die like a dog for the want of a crust, while her son, her only son, languished in prison, for a crime he had never committed—and this was all the work of one man's hands!

Whenever I thought on these things—it was not often I dared—I gave way to madness, I tore my hair and beard, I beat my hands together, I gnashed my teeth and rolled upon the ground like a wild beast in fury, until I was faint and worn and the tempest of passion within me had spent itself.

At last, after many careful inquiries made among those who knew him best, I made a fresh discovery, which was that, though Antonio Laroni was not known to possess a wife, there was a child, a girl belonging to him, a little, timid, shrinking creature, whom he kept shut up alone, away from everyone, and who trembled at the very sound of his voice. And yet, notwithstanding this, it was also said, that if there was anything in this world that Antonio

Laroni could be said to love, it was this same child; though his affection more often took the form of blows than caresses.

Poor Bianca! she was dead, then, after all!

Had he succeeded in killing her too? Had she suffered a violent death? or died only of a broken heart, and a wounded spirit?

Whatever the cause, she had none the less died at his hand, and the sacrifice of another life must be set down to his account. This thought served to spur me on to still further deeds of cruelty and retaliation (though I did not call them by that name), so that I hardly slept by night or rested by day from the task I had set myself. But for all this as I have said, I was still at times, a very lonely sorrowful man, and when I forgot for a brief—a very brief time, the one absorbing interest and passion in my wasted life, I longed, oh! so pitifully, for some innocent companionship—for the affection of some living thing, however humble, if it were only a dog to fawn upon me and lick the hand that fed him.

I remember one day, when this feeling came over me more powerfully than ever. I was returning from my daily work to the dreary, desolate lodging, close up under the chimney pots, which was all I knew of home, though had I chosen, I could have well afforded a better; but what did it matter? what did anything matter to a man who was as utterly alone in the world as I was, so long as he had a roof to cover him, food to eat, and a fire at which to warm himself? Besides, I had another use for my money, so that I grudged myself everything but the barest necessaries. But, as I was saying, as I was returning home one day, there was a big coarse ruffian of a man swaggering along in front of me, as I turned down a narrow dirty street, through which I had to pass—a man who was covered with dirt from head to foot, with a red, bloated face and hands blackened with pitch or tar, or some other foul and evil smelling compound. But before we reached the end of the street, a little child ran out of one of the dirty little houses and, catching him by the leg, called him "daddy" in accents of delight. The child would have been pretty had it been clean; the man, it seemed to me, must have been repulsive under any circumstances; nevertheless he stooped, and, raising the child in his arms, mounted it on one of his great broad shoulders and carried it thus into the

house, taking care so that the little head did not touch the low doorway. I sighed to myself as I passed on. That rough, villainous looking man had someone who ran to meet him and was glad at his return.

Then, as I turned into another and a better street, I saw a man — an Italian — grinding tunes from an organ, with a monkey in a ragged red coat perched upon his shoulder. I stopped and looked at them for a few moments—the man with his white teeth and gold earrings, the monkey with its queer, pathetic, half human face. The sight brought back to me so many memories, and before I continued my way I gave the man a coin — a larger one, no doubt, than he often received, and which caused him to pour forth a whole string of thanks and blessings upon my head, in a jumble of Italian and English. Then, addressing the monkey, he said in his own tongue,

"Come, then, Jacopo, to-night we will sup grandly; there will be maccaroni for thee as well as for me, and thou shalt have a new warm coat ere the winter, my cherished one!"

I laughed to myself as I heard him, but there were tears in my eyes. To think that I had not even a monkey!

The day after this I found a poor, lost and starving dog in the streets. He was an ugly animal, with but one eye and covered with old scars and marks of ill-treatment. He was crouched in a doorway, and as I passed he lifted his head and gave one faint, piteous whine. I stopped and looked at him attentively.

"Here," I said to myself, "is someone worse off than yourself. Like you he is an outcast, and like you he has received little from the world but blows and cruel usage. Perhaps, if you take the poor beast home and feed him and tend him, he will come to love you. True, he is not handsome, but then neither are you, whatever you may have been once, and even the affection of an ugly, one eyed cur is better than nothing." So I took him home and fed him well; gave him bones to eat and milk to drink and my own coat for a bed, and at the end of a week he was sleek and fat, and would wag his tail and bark joyously when I spoke to him and called him "good dog!" I named him "Nero," because when I was a boy I once had a dog of that name—a curly white thing that slept in my arms and followed me wherever I went, until he died from a kick from a horse.

One day, when he had been with me about three weeks, I took

him out with me and he trotted along at my heels for some distance. Then, all at once, I missed him. Retracing my steps I looked for him everywhere, but in vain; he was gone. I shrugged my shoulders. Well, I supposed it was my fate always to lose what I would have wished to retain, and I cursed the faithless animal who, as soon as he had become fat and flourishing at my expense, had forsaken me. But I did him wrong, the poor beast, by that thought!—for some time afterwards I saw him again. It was on a Saturday afternoon and in a very low part of London. I had been tracking the footsteps of my enemy, after watching until I saw him leave his house, and was wondering what had brought him into this quarter. He did not know that I was following him this time, for I was very cautious, being desirous of discovering what his business was in this part of the town. I was always anxious to find out anything about him I could—anything; that was, that might be used against him, and all that I could learn concerning his manner of life, his ways and habits was useful to me.

After following him for a long time through a perfect labyrinth of narrow filthy lanes and alleys, I saw him enter a shop where they sold old clothing, old furniture, old books, everything, in fact, that was old and shabby and fit only for the rubbish heap, and which was kept by an old Jew, who looked older and dirtier than anything else in his shop. I had a great desire to find out what Antonio sought there, but knew not how to gratify it, as I could not venture near for fear of discovery, and I did not want him to discover me, at least, until I had found out what I wanted to know. So I entered the doorway of a dark, foul smelling court, lower down the street, on the opposite side, and waited.

While I did so a man came out of a low beershop at the corner—a man who stumbled and swayed about as he tried to walk, and whose mouth poured forth a flood of horrible language.

"Curse the dog!" he cried, looking round for something with his vacant, bloodshot eyes; "where's he got to now? Oh, there you are, are you?—take that!" "That" was a brutal kick, and then I saw that close behind him was the same animal I had found and saved from starvation some time before, only to lose him again. Now he looked almost as bad as he had when I first met him; his body was nothing but skin and bone, and he was also lame in one leg. I whistled softly and

called "Nero, Nero!" The man did not hear me, but the dog did and recognized the name he had gone by while he was under my roof, for he pricked up his ragged ears and, uttering a short, sharp whine of pleasure, limped half across the road to meet me. Then he suddenly stopped, as though his dog's mind had remembered something, looked at me wistfully, gave one mournful little cry, and, turning round again, trotted slowly and painfully after his other master, who was staggering along the opposite side of the way. It was as though he had said, "My inclination lies with you, and the thought of those bones is almost more than I can bear, but my duty is with him, and though I know I shall get nothing for it but kicks and curses, I must do my duty as long as there is any breath left in my wretched body!" Evidently the man must have been his original owner, who had either lost him or voluntarily abandoned him to starvation, and the faithful creature, meeting with him again, had deliberately relinquished his good fare and comfortable home, to return to the old miserable existence.

Ah! that was a dog worth having, in spite of his ugliness and his possessing but one eye! But I must not forget the man I was watching. All this time he was still in that dingy shop. Had he come to buy or sell? After waiting a little while longer, I ventured to walk past the place on the other side of the road, keeping my face carefully in shadow. Yes, he was still there, and there seemed to be a very eager bargaining going on between him and the shopkeeper over something or other. Laroni appeared to be examining some object carefully, and the old Jew was throwing up his hands, and I could imagine him calling upon the shades of his forefathers to testify to the excellence of the article under inspection. I could just see this much and no more between the heaps of old garments and old shoes, old iron and broken china, and every other sort of rubbish, which filled the window. So I returned to my doorway again. I had not much longer to wait, for looking cautiously round the corner, I saw Laroni soon afterwards leave the shop, and drawing back still farther into the shade, I saw that he had one hand hidden inside the breast of his coat, as though he carried something concealed there, which he guarded carefully and feared to lose. I noticed, too, that he trod more firmly and carried his head less sunken

between his shoulders; also that there was a restless glitter in his eyes, and a spot of colour in each cheek, while his lips moved and twitched. Evidently he was under the influence of some excitement, and there was, besides, a certain air of elation about him. I let him pass, without troubling to follow him, while I remained and pondered what these signs meant. What I had to find out—what I must find out—was first, what had he come so far to buy? And secondly, what he meant to do with it? The first question was not easily answered, the second was less difficult; for from what I had noticed in him on leaving the shop, the change in his expression, and the air of satisfaction about him, there seemed to be but one possible answer, and that was—mischief. There was danger in the air—danger brewing for me, unless I kept my eyes wide open. Not that I feared anything that Laroni could do against me, for, as I think I have already said somewhere in this narrative of mine, I believed that I was under special and Divine protection until I had accomplished what I had to do; nevertheless, it was as well that I took some precautions.

After thinking deeply for some time, I made up my mind, and crossing the street, entered the grimy cob-web hung den of the old Jew clothesman. It was piled to the ceiling with rubbish of every description, and yet here and there, among it all, one caught a glimpse of something which looked as though it might have been of some value, could one but have cleared away the dirt which covered it. Still, as I looked about me, I could see nothing that seemed at all likely to be of any use to Antonio Laroni, or cause him so much pleasure in the possession. The old Jew shop keeper came forward on my entrance, rubbing his dirty hands together gleefully, as though he had lately made a good sale and hoped to make another.

I think I astonished him very much, for, instead of asking the price of any article, or inquiring for such and such a thing, I simply said to him, "What did the other man buy?

He stared at me in amazement.

"The other man!" he repeated, slowly; "what other man? There are many who come here to buy—very many—because they know they will get such good bargains—such excellent bargains—what does my good gentleman mean?"

"I mean," I said, slowly, "the man who just now left your

shop—your last customer, who has only just gone—for no one but myself has entered the place since. And I want to know what you served him with."

A still more cunning expression passed over his cunning old face.

"You want to know what he bought?" he inquired, leering at me; "and might a poor old man ask why?"

"Because," I said, "I want to buy the same."

The cunning look gave place to a perplexed one.

"You want to buy the same?" he repeated, as though to give himself time for consideration.

"Yes; I want to buy the same," I repeated after him.

"Whatever the article?"

"Whatever the article—that is, if you have another like it."

"Then you know what it is?" he asked, peering at me inquisitively.

Should I answer yes or no? If I said no, might he not press upon me any rubbish or worthless trash, secure in my ignorance? If I said yes—I hesitated a second.

"Yes," I said.

"It is very fortunate that I have one other left, and only one," said the old man, on receiving this reply. "Ah! but such a one! there is not another like it anywhere—not another to compare with it. In fact, it is even superior to the one I have but just now sold to the other gentleman, and so cheap, too!"

Thus he rambled on all the time he was searching for it in the back of the shop.

Searching for what?

"Here it is," he said, coming forward again with something in his hand, which he wiped upon the sleeve of his ragged old coat; "here it is—see! a real Andrea Ferrara—such temper! such workmanship! such finish!"

It was a finely wrought long and slender steel blade, contained in a frayed and tarnished velvet sheath—a veritable stiletto!

Ho! ho! I thought to myself, so this was the purchase you made, Antonio, my friend! And upon whom do you purpose to use it?—yourself, or another? Little doubt of the answer?—and that other—is there any need to ask his name? I think not.

"How much?" I asked the old man.

As a matter of necessity he began by demanding twice its original value, and as a matter of necessity I, also on my part, began by offering him half what I meant to give. After many words and much wrangling over the matter, at last we came to

terms. I flung down the sum upon the counter, and taking up my new purchase placed it carefully in my breast pocket,—the same pocket as that in which Antonio had carried away his—while the old Jew stood in the doorway of his shop, and rubbed his hands together with much satisfaction as he watched the departure of his second customer.

So you have bought a dagger to slit my throat, or stab me in the back with, some nice, dark night, friend Laroni! Let us hope you will not succeed. Perhaps it is just as well that I have furnished myself with another—not to take your life with, my dear 'Tonio — oh, no; your blood is far too precious to be spilt in that careless and hasty fashion. You must suffer a little more before you die; I cannot spare you yet, I am not sufficiently prepared; you must really wait a little while longer. The weapon is merely to defend myself with if need be, for there are some pleasures I must deny you, and one is that of seeing me lying at your feet, with your blade in my heart, and your secret dead with me. Therefore, I must be careful—I must not allow you to take me at a disadvantage.

So, for a time, I carefully avoided all lonely streets, and all dark courts or alleys. I also took the precaution to walk in the middle of the road when out late at night. Still, I was not afraid, and though I carried the dagger in its sheath about with me, I had resolved only to make use of it as a last resource and if my life were in actual danger on any occasion. Just at this time, too, Laroni disappeared for some weeks. At first I feared lest he had fled from me; but I soon had good reason to believe that he had merely been sent on a mission to another branch of the Society, either to convey or receive information or instruction of some description, which was generally done by word of mouth, or else was written in a cipher, the key to which was known only to a few. Consequently, I relaxed my vigilance during his absence, which might be for days, weeks, or months—no one knew.

But one night, as I took my way homewards, after attending one of the ceremonials of the Order, as I passed the entrance of a dark and noisome lane, I received from behind a sudden blow, accompanied by a sharp and painful sensation in my left shoulder. I turned to grapple with my assailant, but he was more active than I, and, wrenching himself from my grasp, he took flight and I knew that it was useless for me to try and follow him; for the

prison cramps had so crippled my lower limbs that any degree of speed was impossible to them. Of course I never doubted for a moment that this—my would-be assassin—was my once bosom friend, Antonio Laroni (who had returned from his secret mission without my knowledge). I knew it, though I had not succeeded, in the darkness and the shock of the moment, in catching a glimpse of his features—I also knew the weapon. Something had turned the point of the stiletto, good Milan steel though it were, or else the arm which directed it was unnerved by fear; for the only ill result was a rather deep, but comparatively harmless, gash, below the shoulder blade. The loss of blood, however, made me sick and faint, and it was with difficulty that I succeeded in reaching Andrea Menotti's abode, which was nearer than my own, and claiming his assistance. He was much alarmed at the appearance I presented, with my blood soaked garments and ghastly countenance, but he bathed and bound up the wound with no little skill, and administered a cordial, which aided in restoring me to something like my ordinary condition.

"What will you do?" he asked, anxiously.

"Nothing beyond what I had originally intended," I answered, with composure.

"Then you will not arraign him before a tribunal of the Society?"

"Not yet; all in good time," was my reply.

"I know not what you may purpose," he returned, "but poor man as I am, not for a thousand pounds would I stand in Laroni's place; for you are a terrible man, Cesare, and you have a look about you sometimes which makes me shudder."

"Menotti," I said, pressing his hand, "there are times when I shudder myself at the thoughts of my own heart, but I never waver in my determination, all the same."

I wore my left arm in a sling for a few days, but the wound did not trouble me much, and I knew that what pain it did cause me was nothing beside the rage and mortification which Laroni would feel when he discovered that his attempt had failed, and left me but little the worse; in spite of the care he had expended on the choice of a weapon.

One day, not long after this—it was Sunday—I entered one of your churches. It was raining at the time, and I went to get shelter, not to listen to the service or hear the sermon. It was a very plain, dark building, in a

poor part of the City; but there was a fine stained glass window at the farther end. The congregation was but small, and was made up, for the most part, of poorly dressed men and women, with patient toil-worn features, who looked as though their lives were as hard as their hands; but they all listened attentively to the preacher, who was a young man, with a thin, earnest face, and a full, penetrating voice. I took a seat in a dark corner near the door, and listened too, because I had nothing else to do, and it was better than being out in the rain. This was the first religious house I had entered since I had been released from prison. I had had no time to give to religion, or to the welfare of my soul, when all my thoughts were spent on this world; and, by some strange chance, it happened that this first sermon that I heard, after all those years, was about love. Divine love—human love—the love of God to man, and the love of man to his brother! We were—so the preacher taught us—to love our enemies, in spite of the injuries they might do us — our employers — all four-footed things—all those we came near to, from the highest to the lowest and the least; we were, in fact, to love everyone, and everything but—the world, and the things of the world, and hate nothing but sin! Fine words, I thought, as I listened to them, but only words, after all; and yet, I thought the man who spoke them believed what he said. It also seemed to me as I looked at him and listened more attentively to his discourse, that there was something about him that reminded me of that other man, with a heart as big as his body—that great, strong, generous, splendid young Englishman, whose wonderful goodness to me I can never forget. Ah! there was a man for you! And, though this one did not resemble him in a single feature, yet there was something in the way he held his head; or in the expression of his face, or the tone of his voice that reminded me of that other.

The sermon was not long, and after a hymn had been sung and a benediction pronounced, the people went out. But I still sat there, with my head on my hand, plunged in such deep thought that I did not observe when someone spoke to me, until he touched me on the shoulder. It was the young priest — clergyman — I should call him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but you did not hear me when I spoke to you. I saw you sitting here alone, and I

thought that perhaps you were in trouble, and were waiting to speak to me. Is that so—and can I help you?"

It *was* in the voice after all that the resemblance lay. I noticed it more particularly now that he addressed me close at hand.

"No, no," I said, rising from my seat. "It is I who must beg you to excuse me. I did not notice that the service was over and all the people gone."

"You must have been thinking very deeply," he said, looking at me with kind but keen eyes that seemed as though they could see right through me, and read my thoughts as easily as they had the words in the great Bible on the desk of the pulpit. I owned that I had.

"And judging from what I saw of your face your thoughts could hardly have been pleasant ones."

"Pleasant!" I repeated after him; "how should they be?"

"Then you *are* in some trouble?" he persisted. "That was what I thought at first. Are you sure that I cannot help you at all? I wish I could." He said this so simply and earnestly that I was touched by emotion.

"Ah, if you only could!" I answered, passionately, "but there is no one who can, no one at all!"

"You forget," he said, solemnly, raising his hand and pointing upwards.

"I know there is the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints," I answered, crossing myself; "but they are such a long way off and have so much to do; it is not to be expected that they would trouble themselves about one poor mortal like myself."

"You belong to the Romish Church, then?" he asked. "I could tell you were not an Englishman, though you speak the language quite correctly."

"Ah," I said, "I have been in England so long—two years, and some months. You smile, but it seems long, very long to me."

"Have you not laid your trouble, whatever it is, before one of your own priests?" he asked.

I shook my head and sighed. "Could he bring the dead to life again, or make me young and strong as I was before it came upon me? Could he put hope into my heart and peace into my breast, or help me to forget? Ah, if you had suffered?"

I stopped, for a spasm of pain passed across the pale worn face of the young priest.

"Man!" he said, in a voice that was shaken by some powerful emotion, "do you think that you are the only one—that others have not felt the same! Your burden may be heavy indeed, but it is not you alone who bear one. There is suffering all around you wherever you may look. This world is made up of it. We must look beyond."

The rain had ceased, and a little ray of sunshine struggled bravely in through the stained glass window, and sent a stream of rose coloured light across his features as he stood for a moment plunged in a reverie, so that he reminded me of an old picture of the martyrdom of St. Stephen, which was one of my mother's greatest treasures, and I wondered what had become of it. But the sunbeam, as though discouraged, crept in again, and the young priest, passing his thin hand over his forehead, with a faint sight, said again,

"Then you are quite sure I can do nothing for you?"

"Pardon," I said, "you have done something for me already. One is always the better for meeting a good man even though he is of a different religion, and there are so few, so very few!"

"I think you are wrong there," he said, earnestly. "I believe there is good in everyone if we could but see it, though sometimes it is buried very deep down."

I felt that he was wrong, I knew that he was wrong, but would not trouble him by saying so, and he had never met Antonio Laroni! So I turned to go, but paused again on the threshold.

"It is contrary to the rules of your Church to offer prayers for the departed," I said, "or I would gladly have given alms in exchange for your prayers for the repose of my mother's soul. I think that, even though you are what we call a heretic, they would have been heard."

He smiled the merest shadow of a smile, and asked,

"She was a good woman?"

"Good!" and I felt the tears rush into my eyes. "Show me a better if you can!"

He laid his hand upon my arm. "Then be sure that her own good deeds will save her, and not the prayers of any mere sinful man!"

This was all, except that he put a card into my hand at parting, on which was his name—"The Reverend Gerald Grant"—and said, "If ever I can do anything for you or help you in any way, remember, I shall be glad."

I never saw him again, but I have heard of him once since.

About a week later, as I was walking slowly along that fashionable thoroughfare which goes by the name of Oxford Street, I noticed a tall, broad shouldered, handsome looking man coming towards me, whose face seemed strangely familiar. My thoughts were occupied at the time, as, indeed, they always were, by that one never-ending subject, which filled my mind, to the exclusion of every other matter. We had met —Laroni and I—once or twice since his unsuccessful attempt upon my life; and, in fact, a few days after he had encountered me at a little out-of-the-way café, where, at least, he had thought to have been freed from my ill omened and intolerable presence. But no; scarcely had he taken his seat and given a hasty glance round, when he saw me enter and place myself at the next table to that at which he was seated. I ordered some refreshment for myself, and in the meantime leant back and regarded him at my leisure.

As soon as I saw that I had attracted his attention, I took up a knife from the table and made a motion with it as if I were stabbing someone, while he watched me as though fascinated, and with the glare of a famished wolf. Then I shook my fingers at him contemptuously, and, leaning back in my seat, laughed at him in derision; while he, unable to support the mockery of my glance, left the place, with his savoury dish of salt fish and tomatoes half eaten. I did not follow him, for it had just then occurred to me, as I noticed his hollow cheeks, and the hectic flush upon the high, sharp cheekbones, and heard the hard, short cough which he gave from time to time, that I must not delay my projected revenge too long. The life which he had been leading—or rather, which I had led him—was evidently wearing him out, and he might even now escape me if I put it off too late.

But to return to the man whose face I seemed to know, and yet could not at first recall; in fact he had almost passed me by when it came into my mind like a flash—the Englishman.

Heedless of bystanders, I sprang towards him like one possessed, crying—

"Stop! stop!"

He turned and stared at me in amazement, while I could not utter another word by reason of the choking feeling in my throat; then, slightly shrugging his shoulders, he was about to continue his way, when, recovering my voice, I exclaimed—

'Do you not know me—Cesare Robaudi, whom you—?"

"Ah!" he cried, interrupting me, "and is it really you? By Jove! who would have thought it? How are you?" shaking hands with me violently, as is the English fashion, on extraordinary or unusual occasions, while I knew not whether to laugh or weep with the delight of meeting him once more, so I choked again. Then, seeing that we were attracting considerable attention, and that some persons were standing still and staring at us inquisitively, he stopped an empty cab that was passing at the moment, and bundling me into it headlong, like a bale of goods, entered it himself and gave the order—

"To the 'Langham!'"

The Englishman's Second Narrative.

By Jove, yes, I should think I was surprised when he turned up again in that altogether unexpected manner and tried to embrace me before a crowd of people, in broad daylight! I knew him directly he mentioned his name, though he looked a good bit older than he did when I first saw him, and yet, I suppose, he can't really be much over thirty even now, but he looks nearer sixty, with a long ragged grizzled beard straggling across his chest, and his face seamed and wrinkled like a regular grandfather's. I brought him round to the "Langham" with me in a hansom, and all the while he was trying to kiss my hand, or some such nonsense, and every minute I was afraid, by the look of him, that he would burst out crying over me like a baby. I never met with such a ridiculous, warm hearted, aggravating, faithful idiot as this Robaudi in all my born days. The first thing he wanted to do after he had personally introduced me to the acquaintance of half the Saints in the Calendar, and poured down such a shower-bath of blessings upon my head, that I felt quite saturated with them, was to rush off somewhere or other, there and then, and fetch the money he said he owed me, and which I had lent him some two or three years ago. I wouldn't hear of it—poor old chap! I didn't want his money, though it was very honest of him to want to return it, and certainly he seemed to be in comparatively flourishing circumstances, to what he had been when I first made his acquaintance; but I'd never expected to set eyes on the money again, especially after all this time, in fact I'd almost forgotten all about it, and—well anyhow, I wasn't going to take it, and there was an end of it. So after a time, seeing that it was no good, he left off pressing me, and exclaimed, in a solemn voice and with a peculiar look in his eyes—such as I remembered to have seen in them when he first told me about his imprisonment—"It shall be devoted to the cause!'

I wondered for the moment what he meant and whether he had been deluded into joining the Salvation Army, but it turned out something very different, being neither more nor less than the paying off of old

scores, with our old friend Antonio Laroni. He showed me quite another side of his character, when speaking of this latter individual, and you could hardly believe that this cold, hard, bloodthirsty, revengeful being, who calmly proposed, without a sign of pity or remorse, to make an end of his unfortunate fellow countryman, was the same who, a few minutes before, had been trying to hug me as we came along in the cab. Certainly I must own that this Laroni is one of the greatest villains unhung, but I really can't help thinking that Robaudi carries some of his notions too far. Of course it's very annoying to be stabbed in the back on your way home from your club, or wherever it happened to be that Robaudi was coming from, but—well, he knows best, and really, when I looked at the man, as he was, with his bent form and worn face and prematurely grey hair, and then thought of what he ought to be at his age—strong, upright and healthy and all that sort of thing, I felt that it wasn't my place to blame him, or preach the doctrine of patience and forbearance and the beauty of forgiveness and turning the other cheek etc. I did ask him, though, whether he didn't think that a good conscientious punching of Laroni's head, with the additional ornament of a black eye or two thrown in, wouldn't make things pleasant all round, but he didn't seem to think that it would, and, I couldn't get him to enter into the plan at all. It was a considerable relief to my mind this time, to think that we could carry on our conversation in English, which, with the exception of the accent, he spoke almost as well as I did.

I intend making a considerable stay in London, and as Cesare knows where to find me, I've told him to look me up from time to time and let me know how things are going on, as I feel rather anxious as to how they may turn out and I don't want my old acquaintance to run his neck into a noose if I can prevent him. Unfortunately, in this one particular instance, I'm afraid I have little or no influence over him. I did not think it advisable, on the whole, to inquire further into the scheme by which he intended to get that other unfortunate devil into his power, or ask for particulars of what he meant to do with him when he had, as there was a sanguinary look about him when he approached the subject, which made me think that I'd rather not know, especially as it would be equal to being "accessory to the fact!"

Part III

PART III.

Continuation of the Narrative of Cesare Lobaudi.

I NOW began to draw more closely the meshes of the net which I had woven round my enemy, and into which he must inevitably soon fall. One thing which I did was to change my lodgings and take a room, which was to let, in a house immediately opposite that in which he dwelt. Often and often I have sat far into the night, watching his light, which sometimes burnt until the faint glimmer of dawn heralded the advent of another day.

What was he doing in those long, restless hours, during which I waited so patiently while the passing and repassing of his shadow, as it was reflected upon the blind, showed what an unquiet spirit had possession of him? I had no pity as I observed the bowed head, and the agitation and despair which were betrayed in gait and gesture. What were his sufferings, after all, whatever they might be, compared to mine, which I had endured for as many years as he had known months. And at this time he was quite unaware that I was close at hand watching and gloating over his fruitless struggles, and each fresh proof of my power and his weakness. On some of those evenings during which I sat in the darkness and watched, I saw another man enter the house and remain there, it might be an hour; it might be more. Then there would be two shadows reflected on the blind, one of which would appear to be talking earnestly and urging something on the other, who listened, but spoke little. And after the visitor—whoever he might be—had gone, the light in the window opposite would be burnt far into the night, and the shadow on the blind would pass and repass with restless and uneven step, backwards and forwards — backwards and forwards, unceasingly.

It was in the month of gloomy November—gloomy, at least, in England—when the streets of the City were slippery with mud and slime, and the fog crept in at the windows and the chinks of the doors, chilling you even as you sat by the warm hearth;

while without, it wrapped everything in a dense, black suffocating cloak of wretchedness. It was midnight at midday, and cold—bitterly cold! On that night, too, there was a special meeting convened, at which all the members must attend. Antonio Laroni was there—more hollow cheeked and hectic than before, with a fierce glitter in his eyes, and a cough which from time to time shook him to the centre.

Ever since I had taken that room opposite, I had ceased, at least outwardly, to dog his footsteps as heretofore, and had left him, comparatively, in peace. That night, too, I left him alone, for—I said to myself—it was the last! The business and ceremonial seemed longer and more tedious than I had ever before known them to be—would they never be done?

At last the concluding benediction, "Go in peace" was pronounced, and never before had it sounded so empty and meaningless. One by one the brethren dispersed, the lights in the iron sconces were extinguished, all but one, and there was no one left, besides myself, except the sentinels on guard—the one at the outer door, and the other before the shrouding curtain behind which the Grand Master still lingered in silence and solitude; awaiting the time when he might retire as he came—unobserved, and enveloped in the mystery which always attended his movements. I approached the second sentinel, and delivered to him a message, to the effect that I had a secret and important communication to lay before the Grand Master, and one which vitally concerned the interests of the Society at large. He heard me in silence, and vanished behind the curtain which cut off the recess. After the lapse of a moment or two, during which I heard the sound of low voices, he reappeared, and, beckoning me forward, raised the curtain sufficiently for me to pass, then again dropped it behind me, as I ventured alone into the August Presence, while he resumed his watch without.

I raised my hands to my eyes, and afterwards folded them upon my breast, in token of salutation, and submission, and waited for him to speak; for none address their Chief and the Head of their Order without first being questioned by him. The piercing eyes from under their pent house of cowl were riveted upon me, the skeleton in the corner, with the crown and sword lying at its feet—emblematical of the attributes and sway of the only sovereign acknowledged by "The Seven"—

seemed to grin at me, and peer through its sightless sockets in the dim light of the swinging lamp, and the inquiry came,

"What seek you, brother?"

"Justice," I replied,

"And justice you shall have, never fear!"

I bowed my head in silence, and he continued,

"Justice for whom?"

"Justice for the traitor, Antonio Laroni, who for a bribe has betrayed the Brotherhood and sold their secrets for gold."

"The proofs."

"They are here," and I laid before him, on the block, beside the axe and crucifix, the papers I had brought with me.

He glanced over them impassively, so it would have seemed, but for a faint and barely perceptible quiver of the thin, delicate nostrils which betrayed to the keen observer that his calmness was only of the exterior.

He turned the last page; then, looking up, added,

"It is well; but the witness—he to whom this document was given—where is he?"

"Not here; but he can be produced when necessary."

"See that it is done. I do not ask how you have obtained possession of this evidence; it is enough that you have unmasked a traitor. The Society is your debtor—what do you ask in return for this service that you have rendered to Her?"

There was a pause, during which I felt those unfathomable eyes searching me through and through, and the skeleton in the corner grinned wider than ever, and pointed with its long fleshless forefinger to the sword lying at its feet. Then I spoke.

"I ask that the punishment—the sentence inflicted upon the traitor Antonio Laroni may be given into my hands, to be carried out by me—subject to the decrees of the Society."

There was a profound silence while one could have counted a hundred.

Had I been too bold, and was the reward I craved to be withholden from me?

At last he spoke. "Cesare Robaudi, do you know what you ask?—that 'The Society of the Seven' has but one form of punishment, and one sentence to pronounce upon those who betray her—Death! That for him who is chosen for the office to which you aspire, and who fails to carry it out to the uttermost, there is but one punishment and one sentence—Death! Are you prepared to join the ranks of 'The Devoted' to whom is assigned the duty of avenging

the Brotherhood upon those who are false to their Holy Order, and take upon you their awful vows?"

The answer came firm and steady, "I am."

The Grand Master addressed me once more: "Be here at midnight, to-morrow, and pass the interval from now till then in fasting and meditations. Go in peace!"

Another dark, foggy day had come and almost gone, and the church clocks were striking twelve as I, accompanied by the man by whose means I had become possessed of the important proofs of Laroni's guilt, entered the court of the Society's headquarters. He was a member of the private detective force, and celebrated for his skill in difficult and uncommon cases—a man who would patiently hunt down his quarry with the pitiless and unfaltering sagacity of a human bloodhound, or unravel and follow the most tangled clue which was set before him.

It was in a private capacity that I had sought his aid in that portion of my well laid plan which was beyond my ability, and, in any case, impossible for me to carry out myself. This was the witness I had been commanded to bring with me on my present nocturnal expedition. He was a man who apparently knew no fear or faltering in whatever he undertook; yet, as he entered the gloomy inclosure, surrounded and shut in on every side by high walls, and without even the customary light in the lower window of the house, to serve as a guide, he gave a keen, suspicious look round him for a moment, and but for my detaining hand upon his arm I believe would have turned and left the place. But I tightened my grip, and, as I was even now in my decrepitude the stronger and bigger man of the two, he recognized at once the uselessness of resistance, and in a moment had recovered his nerve, and was ready to make a careless remark about the bad condition of the pavement over which we stumbled to reach the door. I gave seven knocks upon its upper panel, and it swung noiselessly back, disclosing nothing but the still denser gloom within.

The man I had brought with me again hesitated.

"I don't half like this job," he muttered; "why don't the confounded idiots show a light upon the scene; I've a good mind to——"

Before he could finish his sentence I had forcibly compelled him to cross the threshold. The door clapped to behind us with startling effect upon the nerves.

Then, before I could advance a pace, I heard for a second in the darkness a brief strangled cry, and the sound of rapidly retreating footsteps. The next moment that brilliant and instantaneous light, from some unknown source, which I have before described, was flashed upon the scene, and I saw that I was alone. My companion was gone!

I shrugged my shoulders, and waited calmly for what would happen next—the time had gone by when these sensational incidents would have caused me terror or disquietude. Suddenly, however, there seemed to step out from the wall and stand beside me those two individuals I had seen before, and in whose presence I had once found myself on a previous occasion; they each wore the crimson girdle, from which, now, as then, depended a dagger in its sheath.

I made no demur as they again bandaged my eyes as they had done on that other occasion, and then, each taking an arm, led me towards the staircase, which communicated, apparently, with the upper part of the building.

Again I trod those many flights of stairs and received the caution to bow my head as we passed through a low doorway, after which I heard, as before, the voice of the Grand Master, saying:

"Remove the bandage," and saw that I, for the second time, stood in that small panelled chamber without any visible sign of door or window, in the presence of four individuals; three of whom I recognized as the Grand Master, and the two guides who had conducted me thither, but the other—the fourth—I now saw for the first time. This last was a man of almost gigantic stature, wearing a crape mask, and being also further enveloped from head to foot in a black shroud-like garment. He stood upright, before a desk, which was also hung with black, on which was laid, open, a massive iron-bound volume. This awesome personage was, "*The Registrar of the Dead!*" On the table before the Grand Master was the brazier—with one of the unpleasant purposes of which I had made acquaintance on the first time that I had been conducted to this chamber, and a dagger with a zig-zag blade. Being motioned forward, I advanced between the two who had formed my escort, while the Grand Master propounded to me the formula in use upon these momentous occasions.

"Cesare Robaudi, are you prepared, after the interval allowed you for earnest consider-

ation, to take upon you the solemn and awful vows pertaining to him who desires to become one of the Mystical and Sacred Order of 'The Devoted,' to whom is assigned the task of purging the Society of all traitorous and corrupt members, and exterminating those who are pronounced accursed? If so, draw near and, falling upon your knees, reverently repeat after me the Oath of Consecration—first kissing the steel of the avenging instrument, which is the symbol of your Office." With one hand he held the dagger to my lips, which, when I had kissed, he pointed to my breast, while I repeated the following words after him:

"I swear upon this steel—the avenging instrument of the faithless and the perjured—to keep the secrets of this Society. I consent, if I forswear myself, to have my body cut in pieces and burnt and scattered to the four winds, and my name held up to perpetual execration, Amen."

Then there followed more threats of fearful vengeance, which nothing could avert, if ever I betrayed, or proved disobedient to my vows. After this I was girt with the blood-red girdle—the outward and visible sign of the Body to which I now belonged. This ceremonial of admittance accomplished, the Grand Master placed one hand upon my breast, and, raising the other solemnly on high, pronounced this concluding benediction:

"Blessed be the hand that smiteth and accursed him whom thou smitest—let thy foot be swift, thy hand sure, and thy heart fixed—smite and spare not!"

Then came the form of burning the traitor's name in the brazier—the name of Antonio Laroni was inscribed upon a strip of paper, and committed to the flames; it was then likewise written in "The Book of the Dead," by the Registrar, a curse was pronounced upon him and his—and the dagger with its crooked blade was delivered into my hands, that therewith I might carry out the sentence. Antonio Laroni's name was no more to be counted among the living, for the fiat had gone forth that he must die. I had craved the boon, and it was granted me, and as I drew my forefinger gently along the keen curved edge of the dagger, I felt a fiendish exultation and a thirst for blood.

What a sweet revenge was mine, and had I not kept my word when I vowed to repay him seven-fold? But the Grand Master's voice, raised in speaking, interrupted my reverie:

"Cesare Robaudi, listen once

more to the judgment pronounced upon the traitor; not only is it decreed that he shall suffer, but his family and all belonging to him shall be rooted out—such is the just and equitable sentence which 'The Seven' mete out to all such as seek to betray the Brotherhood. The witness who accompanied you and who has gained a knowledge of things which must only be known by members of the Society will have to choose between two things: Death or the Brotherhood! If he choose the latter—well, otherwise he now knows too much ever to be permitted to leave these premises alive. It is spoken—go in peace and report the death of Antonio Laroni immediately on its accomplishment!"

I took my way homeward with feverish haste, for I longed to gaze upon the tenement which contained my victim. I began to fear that I might have left him to himself too long, and that he might even now already, during my compulsory absence, have taken an opportunity of escaping, and my commission, in that case, be indefinitely prolonged, if not worthless. His window, as I stood and looked up at it, was dark, but that might only mean that he had retired to rest—was it not already long past midnight? Rest! The word was a mockery. Fatigue might bring oblivion, but Antonio Laroni could never rest in peace again. I passed the rest of the night in watching for the dawn, and when I saw signs of stirring opposite I felt myself compelled to go across and inquire of the woman of the house concerning one of her lodgers, Antonio Laroni by name. She stared at me rudely after the manner of her kind and answered, roughly, "That he was gone since the night before, and had taken the child with him—where she neither knew nor cared, as it was no business of hers or anyone else's, so long as her rent was paid, and she wanted no nasty prying foreigners poking round and asking questions of what didn't concern them!" This with her arms akimbo, as I think you term it, and breathing defiance.

Gone! gone, and I had not known it—I who had kept such a ceaseless watch all along, to be fooled at the last! Gone, and all my weary work to begin over again, when I had thought it well nigh accomplished! I took a piece of gold from my pocket and held it up before her.

"This," I said, "for any information concerning your late lodger, Antonio Laroni."

Her manner changed and softened at once under the application of the golden ointment.

"Bill!" she cried to someone lurking in the background, "where was it you heard him tell the man with the cart, as took his things, to drive to?"

"Wapping way," replied the invisible Bill, laconically.

"Nothing else? Are you sure you can remember no more of the direction he gave?" I asked eagerly, feeling in my pocket again and holding up a bright halfcrown before his longing eyes, as he shuffled forward, and revealed himself in the person of a smutty faced, snub nosed, but sharp looking lad of fifteen or so.

"No; but I thinks I could find the chap with the cart, if that'ud do?" he answered.

"Find him, my young friend, only find him and bring him to me and this is yours."

I tossed the gold to the woman and returned to my own room; there to pace up and down, as I had so often watched Laroni do, night after night—like a wild beast in its cage, while I waited for the missing clue.

It was the third night of the fog as, accompanied by the man whom I had bribed to direct me, I found myself in one of the lowest slums of Wapping. We travelled slowly on, examining, by the aid of a lantern, the various common lodging-houses and other disreputable tenements of the dismal and evil smelling locality. Backwards and forwards we tramped through the mud and slush, hindered and baffled by the fog, which became denser the nearer we approached the riverside. At last my guide stopped before a door, on which was painted, in dirty white letters—

"THE MARINERS' HOME,"

and, raising his lantern to inspect the premises, expressed his firm conviction that it was to this house and no other that he had driven the "foreign looking cove with his bits of sticks and the kid" the night before; whereupon, I dismissed him with the promised gratuity and knocked at the door before me. I was closely wrapped up, and kept as much as possible of my face concealed from view, the badness of the weather affording the necessary excuse.

A rough, coarse looking woman of the worst type answered the summons, and in reply to my question, stated, with many oaths, that there was no person answering to the name of Antonio Laroni within, "and she ought to know, seeing as it was her house!"

I stifled a curse between my teeth, but was not to be thrown

off the track so easily, once on it; so, assuming a jocular tone, I replied that I might be mistaken with regard to the name, but the man I wanted had certainly come there the night before with a child.

"Then, why didn't I say so at once, and not stand there palavering, when she'd got her hands full?" she demanded, not yet mollified. "There was a seafaring man, with rings in his ears, as called himself Antony O'Leary, or some sich name, with an ugly little white faced brat, as had taken the top front room in the house, while he was looking for a berth."

I slipped a small coin into her grimy hand. To have offered, or shown that I possessed much, would have been most unwise in such a neighbourhood, and stating that I was a friend of the other man and that he was expecting me, begged her to show me the way to his room.

"As for that," she said, pocketing the money, ungraciously enough, and evidently considering that further politeness would be wasted on me, as nothing more would be likely to be forthcoming, "it's the top front room, as I said before — yer can't mistake it, and I'm—— if I'm going to wait on the likes of yer, so yer can just tumble up yerself."

I accepted this invitation gladly; it was just what I desired, and nothing could have fallen in more opportunely with my purpose. I passed the open door of a squalid apartment, in which half a dozen sailors and watermen of different nationalities were smoking, drinking, cursing, and yelling ribald songs.

"Hi, Sal!" shouted one of these to the woman, "where's my lovely Sal?" Ain't she a-going to favour us with her delightful company?" Whereupon she responded, with an oath and an injunction to "Stow his jaw!"—whatever the mysterious phrase might have signified. The noise they made would, I felt certain, be sufficient to deaden any other unusual sounds in the room above, and I reflected on the admirable manner in which everything had arranged itself for my benefit. I stumbled up the filthy broken staircase, from which, it appeared, that on some previous occasion great gaps had been torn in the hand-rails, or, perhaps, some heavy body had been sent crashing through them down below. In such a den as this what crimes might not have been committed, and the dead bodies afterwards thrown into the river, which would carry them down stream with the tide,

and who would be the wiser? I carefully felt the delicate edge of the well tempered, but curiously shaped blade, of my consecrated weapon, and examined it by the light of a flickering tallow candle, stuck in a broken bottle, which lighted the staircase, half-way up, just where a hole in the rotten flooring might have proved fatal to the unwary.

Antonio Laroni, I am on your track, and the next hour shall see the death of one of us two—out of that upper chamber, to which I am silently approaching, with slow and stealthy step, but one of its occupants shall emerge alive.

I saw a light streaming from under the crazy door-way, at the top of the last flight of steps, and, stopping for a moment, leant against the wall to recover my breath, while the refrain of some boisterous sea song, shouted by lungs of brass, came bellowing up the staircase. He must not find me at a disadvantage, for though I was armed, it was but with the dagger; and he would, in all probability, knowing the hazard he stood in, carry fire-arms about him, so that I must, if possible, take him unawares. At least he must not escape me this time. In order to stir up my spirit more thoroughly for the enterprise, I conjured up in my imagination the vision of my mother's wholesome, wrinkled, brown face, under her linen head-dress and gay striped kerchief, with the long gold earrings, and the cross which decorated her breast on holidays and festivals of the Church; she who might now have been nursing her grandchildren on her knee; and Bianca, who told me that she loved me alone of all her admirers—my lost Bianca! I thought of the prison and the pestilence and the rattle of the rifles of the carbineers outside in the prison square; and, as I recalled all this, I felt the blood tingling in my veins, and the thirst for revenge in my heart, and knew that Antonio Laroni would not escape me this time. Oh, my righteous vengeance!

I crept softly up that last short flight of creaking, crazy stairs, at the top of which two doors faced each other. I laid a hand on the latch of the one from which the light came—the other was hidden in my breast—the frail lock gave way before me, I entered and closed the door behind me. The occupant of the room, who was attired in shirt and trousers of a nautical cut, had his back to the door, as he bent over an open chest, upon the floor, but the click of the lock startled him and he turned swiftly and confronted me.

Never can I forget the wild hunted look, like that of some fierce animal at bay, with which he regarded me! For a moment he stood motionless, as though rooted to the ground, while he devoured me with his eyes. The hectic flush fled from his high, sharp cheek bones, leaving him pallid as a corpse, while the perspiration stood upon his brow in drops of agony. Then from his white and bloodless lips there burst, half unconsciously, the words, "Hast thou found me, oh! mine enemy?"

I made no reply, but, folding my arms upon my breast—one hand still hidden—smiled at him. My silence and mockery stirred him to a sudden frenzy, and, with the howl of a maniac, he launched himself upon me, as though he would have torn me limb from limb.

For a brief space we wrestled together, while he tore at me with teeth and nails like some human tiger. Then, in a moment, this fictitious strength of his gave way, his breath came in shuddering gasps, a film came over his eyes, and, with a sudden, violent effort I flung him from me. He fell heavily upon the floor, and, before he could summon strength to rise, I had planted my foot upon his breast, keeping him down in spite of his frantic, ineffectual strugglings. In choking accents came the question—

"Are you man or devil?"

"I am what you made me, Antonio Laroni," I answered, calmly, still keeping him down as he struggled to rise; while from the regions below came the sound of the drunken chorus, still shouted at intervals by the united strength of the company.

"Then, in the devil's name, who are you—speak!"

"Do you not know me, even yet? Am I then so changed that you do not recognize the once familiar features of your old playmate and companion?"

"Your name! your name!" he gasped; "tell me your name!"

"And has the time come that Antonio Laroni needs to put such a question to Cesare Robaudi, and—"

He interrupted me here with a great cry:

"I knew it! I knew it from the very first time we met, and when you gave me that message; but if so"—with a feeble and pitiable effort at bravado—"what more have you to say to me that you have thus dogged me—even here? What have I done that you should torment me thus? and what is your errand to me to-night?"

"First," I replied, "I have

to say that Cesare Robaudi, when in prison, swore to be revenged on whoever had wronged him so deeply and foully; secondly, as to what *you* have done—man!" I shrieked in sudden and uncontrollable fury, "dare you ask such a question of me!—of the man whose life you ruined to serve your own base ends! — of whose mother you were the murderer! —whose bride you tore away— of me whom you betrayed and outraged without pity or re-remorse?"

I was stopped for the moment by the very violence of my emotion; then, in a calmer voice, I continued, while he writhed beneath my foot in impotent rage and fear—

"My errand, which you desire to know, is not my own; I am but the instrument in the hands of others. Know, then, twice-told traitor, that the Brotherhood which you have betrayed for gold has passed upon you the sentence which is your due; know also that your name is written in the 'Book of the Dead,' that you and yours are inexorably doomed, and that to my hand is intrusted the task of clearing the universe of at least one scoundrel!"

With a gesture of fiendish triumph I flung open wide my outer garment, exposing thus to view the blood-red girdle about my waist, while with the other I brandished aloft the dagger high above my head, like some wild heathen fanatic of old time.

"Behold in me," I cried, "one of the chosen members of the Holy Order of 'The Devoted'!"

The victim at my feet raised his wild, terror-stricken gaze to mine, his parched lips moved and twitched convulsively, a spasm passed across his face, his chest heaved, and his breath came in sobs.

"Cesare," he whispered, hoarsely, while his countenance grew moist with the dew of despair, "tell me that it is not true?—that you will not do this horrible thing."

Then, with a violent effort, he partially raised himself from his grovelling attitude.

"I am no traitor," he exclaimed. "Who dares to say it, or who can prove that I betrayed the Society? It is false — false! I say — as false as——"

"Say as false as your own black heart, Antonio," I retorted, interrupting him, "and since the knowledge will add to your anguish, know that it was *my* gold which bought you, body and soul, it was *my* bribe that baited the trap into which you fell so easily, and cannot escape from, try how you may.

Do you hear me?—do you quite understand?"—to the quivering mass of humanity at my feet;—"it was my own money which I sacrificed willingly to hold you in my power, and the secrets which you betrayed were bought by me, through the man I employed for the purpose, for my own ends! Antonio Laroni, am I not revenged at last?"

The figure at my feet struggled once more to free itself, and, failing, raised one arm in imprecation, while the sound of the discordant singing below floated up the stairs and penetrated into the room in which we were.

"Devil, that you are! curse—" A fearful paroxysm of coughing seized him, so that his face became black, and the veins on his forehead stood out like cords. "Curse you! curse you!" he screamed again, struggling for breath; "may every—"

A torrent of blood burst from between his lips, choking further utterance—the curses died away in gurglings, and he fell back senseless on the floor.

* * * *

I was supporting his head upon my knee, striving to staunch the crimson tide, and wiping the death-damps from his brow. Was he dead? I asked myself, with a sinking heart. Dead? Antonio? No, it could not be; and I redoubled my efforts to save him; chafing his cold hands and loosening his garments that he might have air. Was this the man I had meant to kill without pity or compunction, this poor feeble mortal lying helpless at my feet?

I gently brushed away the matted hair which hung over his forehead, and marked the lines of suffering traced there. Was this the man I had so hated, and thirsted to destroy like some noxious reptile in the way, for whose destruction I had laboured night and day, sparing neither soul nor substance? What was that lying there, with a bluish gleam which caught my eye? I seized it and flung it violently from me with horror and loathing, to the farthest side of the room, where the weapon buried itself in the wall.

"Away with you, accursed thing, away with you!" I cried.

Where was the man who had entered this room but a short while back, planning slaughter in his heart, and having one guilty hand hidden in his breast, and a voice within him, crying, "Blood, blood!"

Gone—gone utterly and for ever, and in his place was the old Cesare Robaudi, with his breast filled with pity and love

for this poor, worn-out, dying creature before him.

"'Tonio, 'Tonio!" I cried, imploringly, in his ear; "it is I—your old friend Cesare—not the man who hunted you down and mocked at your despair. Do you not hear me, 'Tonio, dear old comrade?"

He heard my voice, and, opening his fast glazing eyes, smiled upon me as I bent over him.

"Cesare," he muttered, feebly, as an infant. Then a look of unspeakable horror passed across his ghastly features, and he essayed to raise one arm, as if to ward off a blow.

"He has no mercy, none," he whispered to himself. "He does not know how I have suffered all these long years since I saw them lead him away to prison, and he turned and looked back at me; and now I am dying—dying so fast, and he will neither pity nor forgive."

"'Tonio! 'Tonio!" I cried, with tears, "it is all forgiven and forgotten now," and I raised his poor dazed head upon my shoulder; but he still went on speaking in that weak, scarcely audible voice, and as though addressing some other person, invisible save to him alone.

"And then I repented; but it was too late, and the very boys in the street jeered at me, and there was no one but who hated me, even as I hated myself."

I tried to soothe him, but in vain, as, with his eyes fixed upon something beyond me, he poured out his confession into my ears.

"And the old woman, she would take nothing from me, from the hand of her son's false friend, but preferred to starve and die cursing me. Do you not see her over there in the dark corner, where she always stands and taunts me?"

Involuntarily I turned my eyes in the direction in which he pointed. Heaven knows what I expected to see there, but there was nothing but the shadow cast by the candle, which, stuck in a bottle and standing on a rickety three-legged stool, was fast burning into its socket.

"Look!" he cried again, gripping my arm with feverish strength, the delirium, which now possessed him, giving momentary power to his voice as he continued:

"There is the other one beside her—my wife — Bianca — who used to sell coral at the corner of the Piazza Nuova—for whose sake I did all; and when she found out my treachery she too pined and died, cursing me with her last breath. That was after I came here to this cold, dull country, for I feared to stop in

my own Italy after that I heard he was to be released; but they are both of them always with me."

And he pointed again to the corner of the room where the shadow seemed to have broadened and deepened.

"And now he has come, too, with curses upon his lips, and haunts me wherever I go, so that he may destroy me, and there is no rest for me here or hereafter—and yet—he loved me once"—and the voice became broken and died away in sobs and moans.

"And I loved him, and should have been true to him always if she had not come between us with her beautiful face and form and bewitched me; and yet I struck her often, so that there were great bruises on her delicate flesh, and she grew to fear and hate me—and I hated her, too, for the sin she had caused me to commit—and as she hated me and shrunk away from me, I loathed her and beat her more and more—"

A wonderful thing happened now, for the door, which had been closed all this time, opened slowly and noiselessly upon its hinges, and there appeared upon the threshold of that sad death-chamber a young girl—a child in white, with bare feet, and long hair flowing over her shoulders, who gazed round her fearfully. A child with great, solemn, bewildered eyes and dark waving hair floating around her in a cloud, and so like another child I once knew years ago and loved, that involuntarily I cried, "Bianca!"

The dying man saw the vision and his wandering senses came back to him, and with a cry of agony, he struggled to rise, and cried, "Not upon her—have pity and spare the innocent! spare—"

He clasped his hand in anguished supplication and tried to throw himself at my feet.

Saints in Heaven! and it was I, who in my evil passion and fierce hatred, had taken upon me the attributes and office of the Almighty and offered up this young life also upon the altar of my revenge!

The girl stood still, motionless and terrified in the doorway—the ghastly figure of the father, crouched before me in blood-stained garments with imploring hands uplifted, straining eyes, full of wild petitions, and lips that moved in voiceless prayer; while the sweat of death gathered upon his pallid brow.

Then I spoke: "I swear by all that you hold most sacred, that my life shall be for her life, and I will shed the last drop of my blood ere one hair of her head shall be injured. I take this most pious duty and charge upon me,

and will lay it down only with my life!"

The dying man heard me, his attitude relaxed, the mortal despair upon his countenance was succeeded by a look of peace, his body swayed forward and he would have fallen had not I caught and held him fast in my arms.

His eyes half closed, then opened again and gazed through the film of death at the small trembling creature in the doorway. "Come to me, my child," he exclaimed, in faint far-away tones, "bless you—bless both —my friend, my child, bless—"

There was a slight gasp, a flutter seemed to pass through his frame, his jaw fell, and then all was still.

"Father! my father! cried the child, rushing forward as I laid my burden gently down, and the sound of the vile drunken revelry came echoing up the stairs from the regions below.

"Dear father! speak to your little Bianca!" Then, receiving no answer, she flung herself on the lifeless body and wound her arms tightly round his neck.

"Come," I said at last, disengaging her, "you are my daughter now, and must come with me."

I took her, still resisting, in my arms, and, snatching up some articles of apparel which lay near at hand, muffled her in them. Then I closed the eyes and decently composed the limbs of my once bitterly detested foe.

"Good-bye! Antonio! good-bye, old comrade," I whispered softly as I kissed him on the forehead. As the candle flickered and died out, I crept softly down the creaking, broken staircase with my small, sobbing charge, past the drunken quarrelsome crew, in the lower room and gained the street in safety, while the dead man lay heedless and unheeded above.

The Englishman's Third Narrative.

I REMEMBER the night well, for I had been to the Opera to hear a new singer that everyone was talking about, and had been, as one generally is in such cases, outrageously disappointed; for the woman had a voice like a screech owl, and sang sharp besides. The new star, in short, turned out to be a very inferior sort of luminary indeed. However, I was comforting myself with a judiciously blended soda and brandy and enjoying the flavour of a particularly mild cigar, when a waiter stole noiselessly into the room and announced the advent of "a queer looking party with a bundle 'below' as wanted to see me most pertickler, and though told repeated as it was too late to think of disturbing a gent with his business, whatever it might be—let alone bundles—would take no denial." I felt in the benevolent and easy going frame of mind that a really good cigar, not to mention the aforesaid judicious blend, generally induces in me. "All right," I said, "you can show him up, bundle and all, though I don't know who the deuce it can be, at this time of night!" So he departed, and presently reappeared, ushering in a wild, gaunt looking creature, carrying something that looked like a great bale of second-hand clothing. By Jove! if it wasn't that extraordinary fellow Robaudi turned up again! I'd told him to come and see me from time to time, but never dreamt that it was he, so late as this; though if I'd stopped to reflect, I might have known that it was just the very sort of thing he would do; but when, without saying a word, he unrolled the bundle and showed the contents to consist of a sallow little girl, dressed only in a night dress and fast asleep, I was fairly staggered, and the only thing I could think of to say at the moment was, "Bless us all! what next?"

Robaudi most fortunately seemed to think that this was the most proper and suitable expression that I could possibly have made use of, for he nodded his head solemnly and said, relapsing into his own language, "The Signor has said it, and his are the words of wisdom—the blessing will doubtless come in time." He then proceeded to re-wrap his peculiar property in, what appeared to be, a man's rough pilot

coat and several other incongruous articles of apparel; after which he laid it coolly down on my sofa, touching it as gingerly as though it had been made of glass. Then, for the first time, I noticed that there were marks of blood upon his hands. Good Heavens! I thought, had he then accomplished his dreadful task, and come straight to me with the tokens of the deed fresh upon him? Perhaps he saw the horror in my face, for before I could put the question to him, he began, without any introduction or prelude, to tell me the history of that night, which also necessitated an account of the Secret Society of which Laroni and he had both been members.

Laroni was dead, but not by his hand—dead—and, as he told me, he wept aloud and bewailed him so that I began to think that, after all, my soda and brandy must have gone wrong and mounted, unaccountably, upwards, my bewilderment was so profound!

But after a time I dimly comprehended that there had been a grand reconciliation between the two; such as, I suppose, would have been impossible for those of any other nationality; that everything was forgotten and forgiven, and that, furthermore, Robaudi had taken upon him the charge and guardianship of the other poor beggar's child—which child, by the by, being the immediate descendant of one who had been declared guilty of high treason—or whatever it was—was also under the ban of the Society, and condemned to suffer the same fate as that pronounced upon her father. The infernal brutes!

Robaudi lifted up one corner of the garment that covered her face, and this time I noticed, which I had not done before, that she was as pretty a child as you could wish to see, but sallow, for all that, and skinny. And for her to be handed over to those bloodthirsty ruffians, of whose existence I now heard for the first time, and, perhaps, be bricked up in a cellar, or sewn up in a sack and thrown into the river some dark night—not if I knew it, and, from what I concluded from my friend Robaudi's somewhat mixed remarks, not if he knew it either. I remembered that I had a sister once, just about that size and not unlike her, too, in the face, I fancied, though not so dark and sallow; and she died when she must have been just about as old as this one; and I never could bear to hear of a child—a girl, at least—being ill-treated since then; even if it was the veriest gutter brat and offscouring of the streets.

I proposed, however, first of

all, that while Cesare was spinning his yarn—which seemed likely, too, to be a long one—that we should call one of the chamber maids and tell her to put the child to bed, and then we could settle afterwards as to what was best to be done. It was quite laughable how suddenly I began to take a personal interest in the affair! Robaudi demurred at first and said he'd sworn to the child's dead father never to forsake her, and vowed that no harm should befall her as long as he lived; but I pointed out to him that I was sure he'd no place of his own fit to take her to that night, and that it was more than likely that she'd catch cold or something of the sort, in her present inadequate rig-out. So I sent for one of the chamber maids and handed her over, with some sort of an explanation—I believe I stated that she'd been rescued from a fire, or found on a doorstep, or something of the kind. I gave directions, too, that she was to look after her well, and get her some clothes for the next day, instead of the pea-jacket. Then Robaudi gave me his narrative in full, recounting all the various remarkable incidents which had occurred since I saw him last; how he had hunted the unfortunate wretch, Laroni, down; and gone that very night with the firm intention of killing him—I hope he meant to make a fair stand up fight of it—with no more feeling than if he had been about to crush an insect; and then, all at once, when the poor devil broke a blood vessel cursing him, he forgot everything except their old friendship—and really the way in which he described the death-scene was enough to melt a stone, which I'm not, by any means. I don't exactly know why Robaudi suddenly determined to bring the child to me, except that he didn't know what else to do with her, and wanted a little advice on the subject. You see, if the Society finds out he's played them false at the last, they'll be down upon him like a shot; and the poor chap trembles at the very idea of being hunted and done to death in the same horrible, cold-blooded way in which he, such a little while ago, planned to serve the other man. I could hardly have believed that there were such institutions as this "Brotherhood," as he called it, existing in the present day, or credit the half of what he told me about the extent of its power. I thought such things belonged to the Middle Ages, and, in any case, should like to hand the whole Body, with the exception of my old friend Cesare, over to the police. It was quite evident, though, that he believed every

word himself and endowed these mysterious individuals with perfectly supernatural attributes; consequently the thing was to hide her away somewhere until they'd forgotten the matter—only Cesare says that they never forget—or concluded that he had carried out the sentence to the full, which was pronounced on both alike.

Just then it struck me—the very thing! My old nurse, who has been comfortably pensioned off and settled down in a little out-of-the-way village in the heart of Somersetshire! The very place and the very woman! She'd be only too delighted to do anything to oblige me, not to mention the fact that she's devoted to children, and quite lost now without one to fuss over. I'd write to her by the very first post and settle everything.

But I was forgetting all about Robaudi, and behaving as though it were my own affair entirely, whereas it was really nothing at all to do with me. However, when I mentioned my plan, although he had some foolish and perfectly impossible one in his own head, by means of which he hoped to be able to keep the girl with him, he could not but own that mine was infinitely the best for all parties concerned.

One thing, however, he did insist upon, which was that the entire expense of the proceeding should be borne by him, otherwise he would consider that he had not carried out to the spirit and letter the oath which he swore to her dying father, which was all nonsense—only I couldn't make him see it, especially as he says that he is in the receipt of good wages, the half of which is sufficient for his own needs.

Notwithstanding this and his refusal to let me even share the expense—which, after all, will be very light—I have insisted on appointing myself joint guardian and co-trustee, or whatever the proper term is, to this new and, what I think is likely to prove interesting acquisition of my friend Cesare Robaudi.

How the undertaking may turn out, however, remains yet to be seen.

Continuation of the Narrative of Cesare Robaudi.

ANTONIO LARONI was dead, and my aim and object of existence had perished with him. But no—for he had bequeathed to me a legacy which, for the future, must take the place and be to me what my long cherished scheme of revenge had been in the past. I must have something on which to centre my hopes and fears — something to fill the void which that old serpent I had nourished so long, left, when it uncoiled itself from round my heart and vanished.

The mainspring of my life was gone—there was nothing to live for now that Antonio was dead, unless it were Antonio's orphan daughter. She was soon quite safe and happy under the care of that excellent woman whom my English friend had brought, like a good fairy, to our assistance, and who bore off the pale, frightened little creature to her peaceful country home, where she was to be brought up under the name of Blanche Robaudi, and pass for the future as my own daughter.

The Society had received and verified the report of the death of Antonio Laroni, into the manner and particulars of which they had not thought it necessary to inquire further, seeing that the deed had, in some shape or other been accomplished, and the child of the dead man had disappeared at the same time — doubtless into a nameless grave.

It was well, and the Society smiled on its prompt and faithful servant, and might even have raised him to higher honours, had he not, with shrinking modesty, shown a strange unwillingness for further promotion and asked only to be allowed for the future to be spared from similar arduous and dangerous undertakings, on the plea of daily increasing feebleness of body and loss of nerve.

The plea was accepted, and Cesare Robaudi allowed to retire again into his original obscurity, being spared, except on extraordinary occasions, from enforced attendance at the future meetings of the Order.

Then was a time of comparative peace, such as I had not enjoyed for many a long year, and during that time my adopted daughter grew into my heart and became to me more than her father had ever been. I did

not dare to visit her often, only once in each two or three months or so; but those few days spent in her innocent society were the brightest spots in my colourless and monotonous existence, long looked forward to and often recalled with tender anticipation and fond regret.

And she, for her part, soon learned to know and love me well. The sad and weary past was quickly forgotten at her age; the memory of the father for whom she had felt an affection mingled with fear, became gradually fainter, and the sorrows and suffering of her earlier years were merged and lost in the happy careless present. She appeared taller and fairer each time I saw her; her eyes ceased to be too large for her face, and the dead mother looked out of them and smiled upon me in the living child. To the good woman to whose charge she was committed, she became the very apple of her eye, and her only trouble was that her dear young master could not see how beautiful and strong and healthy his youthful *protégée* was growing. For this dear eccentric fellow had departed soon after the introduction of our little Blanche, into our midst, on a tour round the world, which was to last—until he returned, and that might be to-day, to-morrow or years hence. He had already been gone three years and more, when I paid one of my customary Saturday to Monday visits to the child. I found her more charming and dutiful than ever and grown almost beyond knowledge—looking at least three or four years older than she actually was. Her good motherly guardian exhibited her latest accomplishments with fond pride and produced copy-books and samplers to prove the progress made at the little country school she attended. But, on my return journey, it seemed to me that someone—a man in a soft felt hat and long brown coat, took a strange and inexplicable interest in my actions. I observed him first at the station. He was standing on the platform of the little country station, looking on at the somewhat emotional parting between my adopted daughter and myself. Then, when I alighted at the other end of my journey, he stepped from the carriage next to mine, and again there was that swift upward and downward glance which first aroused my suspicions. I was so easily alarmed now, the mere idea of possible harm or danger of any kind threatening the child made me tremble like a leaf. And I could not disguise from myself the fact that there was danger—frightful danger, if her existence

were once suspected. But I could do nothing; only wait. In the course of the next few days, however, my fears had mostly disappeared. I had dispatched a letter to the little house down in Somersetshire, asking was all well—had any suspicious person been seen or heard of in the neighbourhood? and received the answer that all was well, there had been no one seen, and nothing to cause alarm. Not that the good woman knew the truth, or the sad and terrible circumstances which threatened her charge's life and welfare; only she had been told that there were good reasons for keeping her thus secluded, and that gossip, or strangers attempting to prosecute inquiries, were, on every occasion, to be shunned and discouraged. The weeks passed swiftly by, and it was almost time for me to begin thinking about paying my next visit to Bianca and her nurse, when I received, what was very unusual with me now, a summons, urgent and peremptory, to attend a meeting of the Society on the next night but one. The fact was nothing in itself; but these summonses of late had become less and less frequent, and in my present frame of mind the least circumstance which seemed to bear upon the object I had most at heart, excited in me an uncontrollable and paralyzing nervousness. Moreover—a thing which seemed in my eyes of considerable and disquieting import—I had on the very day before noticed on the opposite side of the road, the man in the slouched felt hat and brown coat who had first aroused my uneasy suspicions. He stood on the pavement, staring up at my window—what did he do there? and what reference had his appearance in that spot to me and mine? I feared to think, and again, sent off a hurried note into the country, asking "Was all well?" and again received the same reply as before. Nevertheless, I prepared to obey the summons I had received, and on the night in question was in a much calmer and easier frame of mind, than would have been mine but for certain glad tidings which had reached me that same morning. It was a letter from my good friend, whom I had thought still to be shooting buffaloes on the prairies, or hunting the chamois across the ice and snow. It merely said, "I am on my way home, and shall be at my old quarters, the 'Langham,' to-morrow evening; come and see me as soon as possible."

This was good news indeed,

and in it I forgot the forebodings of approaching evil, which had lately been troubling me, or, if I remembered them, it was only to laugh at my own cowardice. "Courage, Cesare, my friend!" I said to myself; "It is not possible that, after all this time, they will be able to recognize in your adopted daughter the child of the prescribed Antonio Laroni."

So I was on the very point of setting forth, on the night in question, and already had my foot upon the threshold, when a small and dirty boy, apparently springing up from the door-step, accosted me, and, pressing a small piece of crumpled paper into my hand, was off like the wind and had disappeared in the darkness before I could question him.

There was a street lamp close by, and by the aid of its light I succeeded in making out the import of the mysterious communication. On a piece of common dirty paper was written, in a feigned hand, "Do not come to-night — dangerous!" Below this was a roughly executed sketch of an axe and crucifix. Holy Mother of God! what did this mean? What was the danger indicated? I knew but one source from which it could come to me—from that terrible, relentless and far reaching Power into whose hands I had voluntarily consigned myself, and not myself alone.

An awful and indescribable terror fell upon me as I remembered the fate of Laroni, which death alone had averted, and my own share in it. I had sown the wind—was I now to reap the whirlwind?

I went back again to my lodging, and bolted and barred myself therein. Perhaps, after all, it was only a scare, a hoax. But who would dare thus to play with edged tools and sign his communication with the secret symbols of the Society? Who, indeed? and I sat and pondered helplessly, half-stupefied by the panic which had overtaken me, while the hours went by unmarked. What should I do? What could I do? Perhaps even now they were casting lots as to who should take my life. What had they discovered, and how?

I thought of the man in the brown coat who had seemed to watch me on those two occasions—perhaps even now he watched the house wherein I was!

I went to the window, and, pulling aside the blind, looked out upon the night. It was dark and cloudy, and the street was deserted, but I thought I

saw someone standing in the shadow of a doorway opposite. Fool that I was, I was caught like a rat in a trap. Why—why had I delayed a moment in making my escape? Why had I not taken the child and fled long ago, when my suspicions were first roused, and while there might yet have been time?

I dropped the blind, and, extinguishing the light so that my shadow might not be reflected upon its surface, began hastily to collect a few articles in case—

What was that?—surely a footstep ascending the stairs? I looked round eagerly for some weapon, something with which to defend myself. The step came on and on, nearer and nearer, while my breath came in heavy gasps, and the beating of my heart deafened me so that I could at last hear nothing but its loud throbbing.

There was a single tap upon the door, low but distinct—should I open it or not? What would it avail me if I refused? I advanced and flung it wide open, and a man, whose face and figure were indistinguishable in the darkness, pushed me aside and entered. Then a familiar voice asked, in an agitated whisper, "Did you receive my message?"

It was Andrea Menotti. I breathed again, and asked, "Was it, then, from you?"

"It was, and having read it why do you linger here? Did you not guess that nothing but extreme necessity would have caused me to send it?" he continued, angrily.

"But what is the nature of the danger and why—?"

"Why am I here now you would ask?" he interrupted me. "Because you are my friend, and because — I bear you another message from the Society. Listen, you are commanded to deliver up the child of Antonio Laroni, to do with as they shall decide, within three days, or your own life shall be the forfeit. As the offspring of one who betrayed his Order she was condemned to suffer for the sins of her father at your hands. If you refuse to produce her you must take upon you the punishment of disobedience to 'The Seven,' and suffer in her stead. Thus it is decreed, and now," he continued, eagerly, changing from the dull emotionless tone which he had adopted for the delivery of his official communication, "you must resolve at once what you will do. I know nothing of this girl, nor do I ask you now to explain how it is that you have brought this upon you, nor why you have chosen to succour the child of

your mortal enemy, who is supposed to have perished at your hand. I knew, however, that you were summoned to-night to answer to a charge of contumacy and misconduct. I do not keep the door for nothing. I feared for your safety. I took the only means I dared to use to warn you, and yet you have lingered here, for I cannot disguise it from you—even if you obey and deliver up this girl, whom, it seems, you have befriended, contrary to the decree of the Society, I doubt if even then you are safe. But I must not—I dare not stay longer."

He grasped both my hands in his. "We may never meet again, Cesare, the saints above protect you. Farewell!"

He embraced me with tears.

"Farewell, farewell, my friend! and delay not your departure one instant longer."

He was gone. My forbodings were verified. The part I had once played so long was to be reversed—I was now to be the prey and another the pursuer.

God forgive me, for I had brought all this upon myself! There was one thought only which gave me consolation, and that was, that my life was to be the forfeit if in three days I delivered not up my old enemy's daughter into those relentless hands, to whatever fate they might assign her—and there was but one, though various ways of accomplishing it. I had sworn to her dying father that my life should be for her life, and sooner than she should become their victim I would kill her with my own hands. And I had myself brought this terrible fate upon her. It was in this knowledge that the great horror lay. But thanks to Heaven's interposition, the worst was spared me, for in three days, if she *were not given up, my life would be the forfeit, and I should suffer in her stead.*

I found myself repeating the sentence over and over again in my mind; still, I was not willing to die yet; I clung to life now that I had something and someone to live for, and it seemed doubly hard that now that the object of my existence was a worthy and beautiful one, that I should be called upon to leave it behind me for the grave. Once more I raised the curtain and looked out into the street. There was not a soul to be seen. I must be off, off—where? Why, first to the "Langham Hotel," to which, surely, some special Providence had directed my friend's wandering feet. I had not thought of this before, because he had said in his letter that he would be there to-morrow, and I had forgotten that

to-morrow meant to-day — for the letter came to me in the morning, and had been written the day before. Once more I must go to him for the aid which I had never yet sought in vain at his hands.

I am approaching now to the end of my narrative. With what sympathy and fiery indignation my story was received by my good friend, I need hardly say, nor how he kept me with him all that night, planning means for my escape, having first dispatched a telegram, bidding his old nurse come to him at once, without a moment's delay, and bring the girl, Blanche, with her.

He was inclined at first to scoff at the idea of the Vengeance which would pursue me wherever I went, and which, from the first, I never really hoped to avert from myself. He did not know, as I did, of the inexhaustible patience, the endless resources and marvellous skill which lay at Their disposal, and which would all be employed in hunting down one whom They had condemned. But I knew, and before those three days had passed, my hair, which before was only grizzled, was white as snow, and I looked even as I do now, a very old and decrepit man, whose days were wellnigh numbered. By that time we had left England behind us, but I knew that my name was now written in the "Book of the Dead"!

* * * *

I should like to describe to you my friend's surprise at the charming object which met his glance when he was brought face to face with the girl he had not seen since she was brought to him four years ago, fast asleep and wrapped in her father's coat. She was only thirteen now, but so tall and womanly for her age, by reason of her Southern blood that she appeared some years older. I almost forgot the doom which was hanging over me, as he exclaimed, using the very same words he had employed on first making her acquaintance, "Bless us all! what next?" but it was recalled to my mind when my Bianca cried out, in mingled surprise and alarm, as she saw my altered appearance, though in the bustle and confusion of our sudden departure she soon forgot that, and everything else.

The old nurse, on receiving the telegraphic message, had only delayed to stuff a bag with some few necessary articles, and with the key of her cottage in her pocket, had started at once for London. As far as she knew they had not been followed

by anyone, nor had any incident happened to excite alarm.

And this is how we find ourselves here, in this charming island, one of a group, where there is sunshine all the year round, and oranges and bananas hang over our heads—where the sky is always blue, and the water, too, which laps the shore, and both remind me of my own dear Italy, which I shall never see again.

Many of the residents of the place are English, who come here for the purposes of trade, or for the benefit of their health, and it seems as though nothing but peace and contentment could find an entrance into this beautiful spot where we three live together as members of one family — Bianca and I, and my noble friend, whose name, now that I am drawing near the conclusion of my narrative, I should like to inscribe once upon these pages, in token of the deep respect and ardent gratitude with which it inspires me—Geoffrey Hamilton is the name of the man who has again and again rescued me from despair and suffering, and who now acts towards me the part of a dear and affectionate son.

We have been here now nearly two years, which, but for the terror which still hangs over me, and I vainly strive against, would have been to me years of unclouded happiness. But my health and strength, so long undermined, and overtaxed by suffering and privation, have now, under the burden of this constant anxiety and dread, become worn to a shadow, and I may even yet die in peace upon my bed. God grant it!

A month ago I received a great surprise, almost amounting to a shock, for this same Geoffrey Hamilton — this daring, high-spirited, eccentric Englishman came to me with a proposal, which, for the moment, completely took away my breath. He calmly proposed to marry my Blanche, that child who, though tall for her age (and becoming more beautiful and bewitching every day), is yet barely fifteen. He, who was, as I told him, old enough to be her father! But I might as well have spoken to the wind; he merely repeated his proposal, and added that seventeen or eighteen years between man and wife was a mere nothing, so long as it was on the right side, and in another year she would be sixteen, when he meant, of course, with her own consent (of which he seemed pretty sure) and mine (which he took for granted) to marry the daughter of the "late Antonio Laroni"—as they put it in the newspapers.

I could not but feel a little natural jealousy, at the time, at the prospect of giving up my little Blanche, but it soon passed away, as I know she will never leave me while I live, and now there is nothing in my heart but gratitude to think that Heaven has raised up such a protector for the orphan, who will guard and cherish and keep her from harm when I am gone.

Yes, I have much to be thankful for; but there are certain days in the month when my fears are at their height and take possession of me, body and soul—that is when the steamers and ships from at home and abroad put into port and discharge their freights and passengers. Then I stand among the crowd upon the pier and scan the faces of those passengers who land; looking for whom or what I hardly dare to acknowledge even in my own heart.

Yesterday the English ship *Atalanta* touched here, and among those who came ashore was one whose face struck me for an instant with a chilly and inexplicable feeling of dread; but since then I have had reason to believe that he is only an agent for some foreign house, which does a great trade in tinned tomatoes and other goods which are to be obtained here in great perfection and profusion. What attracted my attention to him first of all was the fact of his having his mouth drawn up at one corner, which gave him a very strange and sinister expression.

Some hours ago, as the heat of the day was beginning to abate, he passed here, cigar in mouth, riding in one of the little, light wooden carts, drawn by mules, which are the chief and favourite modes of progression here. He was laughing and talking volubly in French to the driver and was evidently bound on some excursion, and I almost laughed to myself as I recalled the momentary feeling of terror with which something about him which I could not define, unless it were the slight disfigurement I have mentioned, first inspired me; though at the same time I felt perfectly certain that I had never seen his face before. One thing more and I have done.

This morning, when he was reading his English newspaper, my friend suddenly cried out as though much startled. Then, seeing my alarm, which I must have shown in my face, he hastened to reassure me.

"It is nothing," he said; "nothing; only I am surprised and grieved at something I see here."

"And you call that nothing?"

put in the child Blanche, looking at him reproachfully out of her great dark eyes — so like her mother's.

He smiled at her affectionately across the table—for we were at breakfast.

"I meant that it was nothing to do with either you or your father. It was only that, running my eye down the page, I saw the notice of the death of an old friend and schoolfellow—poor old Gerald!"

"Was he, then, so very old?" she asked.

"Old! no, not unless you consider me old," he replied. "I did not mean it in that way, for we were about the same age, and at one time were bosom friends; only he went into the Church and I had lost sight of him for years. I believe he had some great trouble that completely changed his life, for he gave up all his brilliant prospects and went and hid himself away somewhere in the East End of London on a salary of £120 a year, after taking the highest honours at the University. Poor old Gerald!"

"What did you say was the name?" I asked, eagerly.

"Grant—Gerald Grant. Surely, you never knew him?"

"I heard him preach once," I answered, much agitated. "And afterwards, he saw I was in trouble and came and spoke to me kindly. He gave me his card, too which I have even now, and told me to come to him at any time if I thought he could help me. And to think that he is dead—that good man! For I know he was a good man."

"He was the best fellow that ever breathed," was the answer, given with much feeling. "And his death was a martyrdom. To think that you should have met him! Read this." And, handing me the paper, he pointed out a short paragraph.

It simply recorded that there had been a bad outbreak of fever in one of the low lying districts of London, and that there had been many deaths in consequence. Among them was that of the Rev. Gerald Grant, curate in charge of St. Ursula's, who had laboured night and day among the sick poor of his parish, until his strength failed him and he fell an easy prey to the pestilence. His death would be much regretted! That was all. Next to this brief account of heroism and suffering there was half a column devoted to a description of a new play!

"Now I know why he looked like the picture of St. Stephen," I said. "And you never knew what his trouble was?"

"Never," was my friend's

answer; "but whatever it was he has lost it now."

I am very tired to-night, I shall be sure to sleep soundly, at least this once. Last night I dreamt of my mother. I thought she came to me as I lay asleep, and when I looked at her I saw that all the wrinkles were gone out of her face; her back was no longer bowed as I remembered it, and her whole countenance was shining with happiness. And I thought that she laid her hand on my forehead, and said, "You will not be long, my son; for I miss you even *There!*" and I said, "Take me with you now, my mother!" But she shook her head, a little sadly, and answered, "I may not do so, the time is not yet!" Then, as she vanished from my sight, I awoke. Shall I dream of her again to-night, I wonder? Will she come to me again in my sleep? And, if so, will it be a warning to me that my time here is short? For the first time the cloud that has hung over me for so long seems to have lifted, and I feel that I have lost, all at once, the dread which has oppressed me all these latter years of my life. I do not know when I have felt so calm, so free from all earthly cares and disquietude, as I do to-night. Something seems to tell me that the end will be Peace. God grant it! I am very tired, and yet there is no reason why I should be. I can hear my little girl singing in the room above; her voice is very sweet and I shall fall asleep with the sound of it in my ears—Heaven bless and protect her! Sometimes I have thought that I should like to die in my sleep, and, passing quietly away, be thus spared the final pang of parting from my dear ones. So here I conclude my life's history, which has occupied me so long in the writing, and retire to rest, for this one night at least, in perfect peace.

Narrative of the Girl Blanche.

I WONDER whether I have done wrong? I do not see how I can, and yet something troubles me, so that I cannot rest. I think, perhaps, it would relieve my mind if I were to write down an account of the circumstance which perplexes me; if I were to state it plainly on paper I should be able to comprehend the facts of the case better than by just repeating them over and over again in my own mind, as I have been doing. It is late, I know, but I am sure I shall not be able to sleep until I have settled clearly, with my own conscience, whether, after all, I have been to blame in any way, or only been a little imprudent! True, I might have related the whole matter to my father, or to my big brother, as I call him—though of late it has not seemed to please him when I have called him by that name—what else ought I to call him, I wonder? I cannot, surely, speak to him by his christian name, that would be taking too great a liberty, as he is so much older than I am; and the other would sound too cold and formal. I am speaking, of course, of Mr. Geoffrey Hamilton, my father's friend and my own—and yet, though I call him my father, he is really no relation to me at all, any more than the other. I was saying that I might have told this that troubles me to either or both of them; but—at first it seemed such a silly trifle, there really was nothing to tell—it would be making—as it is described in one of the old English proverbs my old nurse was so fond of repeating on every possible opportunity—"a mountain out of a molehill!" And so I put it off until it was too late. At any-rate it is too late now, for I believe everyone in the house, with the exception of myself, is fast asleep. Perhaps it would be better if I went back right to the beginning—it might help me a little — I might remember something in the past that I have forgotten; something which would throw some light upon the present. When I speak of going back to the beginning I mean as far back as I can remember. In recalling the past I seem to have had two lives, and to have been two distinct people. In the first existence I was very often cold and hungry, and nearly always frightened and miserable

I was frightened of someone who said he was my father, who often beat me for nothing at all —unless it was for being unhappy. And yet at other times he would half stifle me with caresses, and call me his "little angel" and his "only treasure!" I believe I loved him, too, in a timid, terrified fashion of my own, and I think it was seeing me afraid of him that so often made him so angry with me.

"Little fool!" he would cry, "is that how you treat your father? shrinking away from him like a whipped spaniel? Come here, or I will beat you black and blue!"

That was after my mother died. He did not beat me so much while she lived; but she must have died when I was very young, for I remember nothing about her except that she was very pale, with great burning eyes, and was always weeping over me and lamenting something that had happened in the past, before I was born; or else quarrelling with my father, while I screamed with terror, so that sometimes the neighbours would come in, and take me away, for fear I should come to any harm between them. I think that this happened while we were in Italy, for I was born there, and remember coming over to England, in a crowded ship, and being very cold and wet and miserable, and wondering whether we had left the sun and the blue sky behind us, and I should never see them again. And soon after we came to England, my mother died. She was not ill long, but one day when she was speaking angrily to my father, she gave a gasp, and when I looked at her I saw that she had fallen back in her chair, and there was something red trickling from between her lips. I remember the great cry my father gave, and how he tried to stop the bleeding, and could not. I remember someone, with a grave face and spectacles, who, they said, was the doctor. I remember being lifted up to kiss her for the last time, and that is all.

After this I was more miserable than ever. We seemed—my father and I—to have no settled home, but to be always moving from one lodging-house to another. I had no playmates, and my father, whenever he went out, would lock me up in the room, with a scanty allowance of food, until his return. Often he was away days together, and when he came back he was always fiercer and more haggard looking than ever; so that I used to dread his return, and long to run away and hide myself when I heard his foot upon the stairs.

And then there came that night when I was awakened from my sleep with a shake, and told roughly that we were going on a journey, and must prepare to start immediately, and there was something in my father's face that terrified me, so that I dared not ask why or where; only obey in fear and trembling. The few things that belonged to us were hastily collected, and thrown into a small cart, which was harnessed to a donkey. I was placed in, too, and we went, it seemed, through miles and miles of narrow, dark streets, until we came to a house —a dreadful house, where there was a woman who swore at me, and called me "a little devil," and at first refused to take me in all, saying that "they did not want brats." And all that night and the day that followed, there was one ceaseless round of quarrelling, cursing and shouting going on below. The house was full of, what must have been, the lowest class of seamen, of different nationalities, who drank and gambled and fought, and behaved more like wild beasts than human beings.

I scarcely know how that dreadful day and night passed, or what it was that woke me on the second night, or how it was that, leaving my miserable bed of coarse sacking, I ventured to creep to the door and listen.

Surely that was my father's voice! But what made it sound so strangely? and to whom was he speaking? They were shouting and singing below, and the noise was very great. Oh, why had we come to such a dreadful place? I would go in, and beg my father to take me away. Perhaps, after all, he would not be so very angry, and, indeed, he had been kinder to me of late; or rather, he seemed not to notice me, as though his mind was too full of other matters to trouble about a child.

I opened the door! I saw my father lying upon the floor; his head was supported by another man—whom I had never seen before—a man with long, grey hair and beard, who knelt beside him. My father's clothes were stained with blood, and there were also blood marks upon the hands of the stranger. It was a dreadful sight to see! He looked as my mother had before she died and they lifted me up to see her for the last time because I was so very small—was I going to lose my father, too?

I was too terrified to stir, but remained just where I was, in the doorway, although I heard him call me to him in accents more tender than I had ever

known him use before, but very low and faint. Even then I did not move, until I saw a change come over his face. His voice came fainter and fainter and died away in murmurs, his eyes closed and his head fell back. Then I ran and flung myself upon his dead body and clung to it, until the man—the stranger whom at first I had accused in my childish heart of hurting my father, because of the blood marks on his hands, gently loosed my fingers, and with comforting words carried me, still resisting, in his arms, away from my father's corpse and that dreadful place.

That is where the old life ends, and from that moment I date the commencement of that new existence which began for me from that very night; until then I had never known what it was to be happy and light-hearted. From that time until now, I have never had a sad moment.

With the fickleness of childhood, I soon forgot the loss I had sustained, and, before long, had almost ceased to remember that I had ever had any other father than the one who adopted me then and there.

I was sent into the country, where, for the first time since I left my native land, I saw green fields and clear streams, and trampled flowers under my feet as I walked, instead of the hard filthy pavement of those endless streets I had been used to for so long. Everything was changed, even my name. Henceforward I was to be called Blanche instead of Bianca, which they told me meant the same, only I was to be made into an English girl, and forget everything that had gone before; but what seemed strangest of all was that I was told that I must also try to forget my own language!

This was very strange and incomprehensible. It was also very difficult; even now I often find myself falling back into the use of the language in which my first syllables were uttered, and it is partly this very thing which is troubling me now and causing me to sit up scribbling to this late hour when I ought to be sound asleep. Have I done wrong? Is it possible that such a trifling matter as that which happened to me to-day can in any way bring trouble, or even danger, to my dear adopted father. To go back again a little way,—It has never been made quite clear to my mind, why we suddenly and with so little preparation left England and came here to live. Why was I taken away from the safe charge of my dear old nurse? How she wept at parting with me; but not even for my sake would she consent to leave her

own native country to come and live among a "lot of nasty foreigners, and be fed on frogs and all sorts of messes, with never a good wholesome joint, from week's end to week's end!"

I think I said just now that I had never known a sad moment since I left the old life behind me, when I was still a little child; but that was one—when I parted from that dear old woman, who had had the care of me for so long.

I have never, I repeat, quite understood why all this was necessary—why we came here and have lived here ever since under another name. In fact, I seem to be always changing my name; but when I spoke of this same thing only the other day to—what shall I call him? Suppose just for this once, as there is no one to hear me or see what I have written— I call him Geoffrey—he laughed and looked at me very curiously, as though, I had said something very clever or remarkable and said, "Suppose you were to be asked to change it again some day—What then?"

"I suppose I should have to do it," I answered," "but of course it would depend upon who asked me, or if there were a good reason for it. If it were you or my father I should know it was right. But I should not care to do it more than once again."

He smiled to himself, and said, "I think I should be able to show a good reason for the change."

"Then, of course, I should do it," I answered, "and you could call me what you liked."

He seemed pleased with my answer—I wonder why—and which of my names he will ask me to change next time? Not the christian one, I hope!

But I am again forgetting what I was writing about—the reason of our coming here. All I know is that it was partly for my own sake and partly for my father's.

They said England was not a safe place for him, and that we should both be better anywhere else; that some wicked people might try to harm us if we remained there any longer; though why they should, I do not know, as I am quite sure we have neither of us ever done anything to injure anyone there.

Why, then, I ventured to ask did we not go back to our own country—to Italy, but I was told that that would be even worse than stopping in England. Altogether I cannot quite comprehend it, neither do I understand how it is that my father is always so uneasy on the days

when the steamers and other vessels from different parts call here to land their passengers or obtain fresh water or provisions. But even though I do not quite understand, nor is it necessary that I should, still this is a very beautiful island that we live upon, and it is always summer here, all the year round. And now at last I have come to what happened this afternoon. The heat of the day had begun to subside, and there was a refreshing breeze blowing in from the sea. My hands were full of flowers —stephanotis, pelargoniums and scarlet japonicas—which I had bought for a very small coin in the flower market——

I left off here, because I thought I heard a faint sound, like someone stirring in the room below, which is my father's, and was afraid for a moment lest he should have been seized with one of his bad attacks of the heart. Shall I go down and tap at his door? That would be to run the risk of disturbing him if he were asleep. I have listened for some moments, but everything seems quite still again. I must have been mistaken, so go on with my writing once more.

As I turned a corner of the road which leads to our little white villa—I nearly ran against someone who was coming from an opposite direction to that in which I was going. The sudden start which this made me give caused me to drop the greater part of my flowers in the dust. I could not help uttering a little exclamation of regret, and the stranger very politely helped me to gather them up again. As he gave the last blossom into my hand, he said, in a low voice, "The Signorina is fond of flowers!"

He spoke in Italian, and in my surprise at this, and before I could remember what I was doing, I had answered him in the same.

"Yes," I said, "I love them very much—more than anything else that—"

Then I stopped suddenly, for I remembered that this was one of the things I had been warned against doing. Particularly had I been cautioned not to speak to any stranger in this language, but pretend ignorance if so addressed.

"Pardon!" he continued, looking at me curiously—and then I saw that there was something peculiar in his appearance, owing to his having one corner of his mouth drawn up much higher than the other, so that it almost met his nostril. "But you are also Italian?"

What could I say? must I tell a falsehood? I felt that I

should have liked to drop all my flowers again, and run away; but that would have been too childish, besides being very unmannerly.

"No," I said, this time in English—"that is—I am quite English. I wish you good-day!"

I was about to move on when, "Pardon," he said again, and this time, still more to my surprise, he also spoke English almost as good as my own, and I wondered why the fact of the poor man having something wrong with one of his features should make me take such an unaccountable dislike to him—it was very wrong.

"But could you tell me who lives in the last villa on this side of the road — the one with the veranda covered with passion flowers?"

"Why," I cried, without pausing to think, "that is our own —that is where I live. "Are you—?" I was going to say, "are you a friend of my father's?" only I remembered that I had heard him say so often that he had only one friend in the world—the one who lives with us or, rather, I ought to say, the one we live with; for it is all his, the house and everything else, for we have nothing of our own—my father and I—except by his bounty. I remembered this—I also remembered another thing, which was that I was acting rather imprudently, so I stopped short and again left my sentence unfinished.

"Oh, no," he answered, just as though he understood all the same what I had been going to say; "I am quite a stranger here, and know no one—no one at all." He seemed, I thought, to be rather anxious that I should understand this: at the same time I thought he smiled disagreeably—or was it only the natural expression of his mouth?

"Oh, no," he repeated, "it was only—" and I thought he seemed to pause for a second to find a reason— "that I admired the situation and the flowers so much. Truly it was a charming abode, fit for its still more charming inmate!" Here he took off his hat and made me a low bow, and I did not know whether to laugh or be angry.

How I wished he would go, or that I had the courage or presence of mind to walk away and leave him. And yet, after all, what had he done or said beyond paying me a foolish compliment, to make me feel such an antipathy towards him?

He was a man who seemed neither young nor old; whose

hair, eyes and skin seemed to be all different shades of the same colour, or rather no colour. He wore no beard or moustache, and his clothes seemed to be of the same light drab, or dust colour, as his face and hair. Altogether there would have been nothing in the least noticeable about him but for the presence of the perpetual sneer, which the natural expression of his mouth gave him the appearance of wearing. Then, seeing that I said nothing, he continued:

"I caught a glimpse, too, of a charming interior through an open window above the veranda, a window with chintz hangings, rosebuds on a pale green ground, through which I could see pictures hanging on the walls, and flowers in stands, and I said to myself this is no doubt the shrine of some fair daughter of the house, or—"

This was presuming too much, but at the same time it gave me an opportunity of silencing him which I could not resist.

"You were quite mistaken there," I said, in a manner which I felt was quite that of a grown-up person. "That was my father's room. Good-day, and thank you for picking up my flowers!"

Evidently the dignity of my manner impressed him, for this time he made no further effort to detain me, only, as I turned away, he said, with a smile which drew the corner of his mouth up still more,

"And so mademoiselle is English after all? How strange that I should have taken her for one of my own country-women!"

I made no answer, but walked away very fast; I would not even look round to see whether he was watching until I had reached our own gate, and then he was nowhere to be seen. Then I did a very foolish thing. I threw away all my beautiful flowers into the road as though they had been poisonous weeds. I did not know why I did this; or if I did know I was ashamed to acknowledge the reason even to myself, so I pretended that they were faded and worthless.

And that is all. Now that I have put it down upon paper I see plainly that there could be nothing at all in this little adventure to cause me the slightest uneasiness. How could there be? And how could I be so foolish as to imagine this possible, or let it annoy me as it has done? I am quite certain that I never saw the man before, therefore it is not likely that he can be one of those wicked people that we came here to avoid. Certainly he was a little impertinent, and that is one

reason why I have not cared to speak of the matter—that, and not wishing to cause my father any unnecessary anxiety. But, then, I cannot help wondering what made him take, or pretend to take such an interest in our villa, when it is just the same and neither better nor worse than any of the others near it. Perhaps I ought not to have told him that it was ours; but then again, why not?

There was a faint sound again just now; it appeared to be outside on the veranda this time, or else I am very nervous and keep imagining I hear all sorts of noises.

I will not write any more, indeed, there is nothing more to write. In the morning I shall probably tear up all this scribble. I am afraid it has been a sad waste of time. In the meantime the clock on the mantelpiece points to half-past one. How sleepy I shall be in the morning.

Concluding Note of Geoffrey Hamilton.

IT is with a feeling of the deepest grief and wildest indignation that I here have to record the foul and cowardly murder of my dear friend, Cesare Robaudi. He bade us "good night" last evening in fair health and spirits, and retired to rest as usual. This morning he was later in rising, we thought, than was his custom, but no suspicion was aroused until his adopted daughter knocked at his door and received no answer. We feared, then, that he might be ill, but the terrible truth never occurred to our minds for a moment. A little gentle force applied to the door soon burst the lock open and I entered, fortunately alone.

"Robaudi, old man!" I cried, to the motionless, and, as I thought, still sleeping figure upon the bed, "how much longer do you intend to snore away this lovely morning, and the coffee getting cold, and—"

Then I saw a dark red stain soaking through the white bedclothes, and, rushing forward, I trod in something slippery!

He had been dead for hours, the doctor said, and stated that, in his opinion, the deep gaping wound over his heart had been caused by some instrument with a *curved or crooked blade.* On the sheet was pinned a piece of paper, on which was written one word, "Traditore," and below it was roughly sketched an axe and crucifix crossed.

In spite of every endeavour and the large reward I have offered, the murderer has not been discovered, and I much fear that he never will be, though I would cheerfully devote the half of my possessions to bring him, or rather, those of whom he is but the accomplice and instrument, to justice. And so, after all, and in spite of every precaution, the fate my poor friend most feared has overtaken him.

FINIS.

DALZIEL BROTHERS, CAMDEN PRESS, LONDON, N.W.

Stirling, May 1890.

WARNE'S CROWN LIBRARY.

Price Two Shillings per Volume.

An entirely New Series, drawn from the works of some of the most Eminent Authors, and embodying many celebrated Novels, as well as other miscellaneous writings which hold a foremost place in English Literature.

The "CROWN LIBRARY" meets a different demand from our now well-known series, "THE CHANDOS CLASSICS;" both being drawn from entirely distinct branches of literature.

The volumes are "Unabridged," and printed from the best Editions extant. They have all been composed in a uniform style from New Type, are very carefully printed on good paper, and bound in a neat cloth style, bevelled boards.

1. VALENTINE VOX. By HENRY COCKTON.
2. ERNEST MALTRAVERS. By LORD LYTTON.
3. ALICE. By LORD LYTTON.
4. THE CAUDLE LECTURES, and THE STORY OF A FEATHER. By DOUGLAS JERROLD.
5. PETER SIMPLE. By CAPTAIN MARRYAT.
6. JACK HINTON. By CHARLES LEVER.
7. IVANHOE. By SIR WALTER SCOTT.
8. THE DEER-SLAYER. By J. FENIMORE COOPER.
9. THE SCOTTISH CHIEFS. By MISS PORTER.
10. THE PRAIRIE BIRD. By HON. C. A. MURRAY.
11. RORY O'MORE. By SAMUEL LOVER.
12. BRACEBRIDGE HALL. By WASHINGTON IRVING.
13. SYLVESTER SOUND. By HENRY COCKTON.
14. THE COLLEGIANS; or, THE COLLEEN BAWN. By GERALD GRIFFIN.
15. MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY. By CAPTAIN MARRYAT.
16. THE FAIR GOD: A Tale of the Conquest of Mexico. By LEW WALLACE.
17. KENILWORTH. By SIR WALTER SCOTT.
18. THE PATHFINDER. By J. FENIMORE COOPER.
19. THAT LASS O' LOWRIE'S. By FRANCES H. BURNETT.
20. THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION. By FRANCES H. BURNETT.
21. HANDY ANDY. By SAMUEL LOVER.
22. HARRY LORREQUER. By CHARLES LEVER.
23. THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS. By J. FENIMORE COOPER.
24. BEN-HUR: A Tale of the Christ. By LEW WALLACE.
25. THE PIONEERS. By J. FENIMORE COOPER.
26. NIGHT AND MORNING. By LORD LYTTON.
27. THE PRAIRIE. By J. FENIMORE COOPER.
28. JANE EYRE. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË.

The Spectator says: "Clearly printed volumes, well bound in brown cloth, and certainly a marvel of cheapness. This promises to be a library of fiction that anyone may be proud to possess, and is really beyond the reach of but few readers."

St. James's Gazette says: "The paper is thick and good, the page a handsome one, and printed from clear type; and the binding is well done in cloth. He must be fastidious who wants anything better."

Other volumes in preparation will be announced at fixed intervals.

LONDON AND NEW YORK: FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.

NOTABLE NOVELS AND NOTABLE BOOKS.

Complete Editions. Demy 8vo. **SIXPENCE EACH.** *Picture Wrappers.*

1 THE SCOTTISH CHIEFS .....Jane Porter.
2 UNCLE TOM'S CABIN .....H. B. Stowe.
3 ST. CLAIR OF THE ISLES .....E. Helme.
4 THE CHILDREN OF THE ABBEY...E. M. Roche.
5 THE LAMPLIGHTER.....Miss Cummins.
6 MABEL VAUGHAN ..... Ditto.
7 THADDEUS OF WARSAW .....Jane Porter.
8 THE HOWARDS OF GLEN LUNA.
9 THE OLD ENGLISH BARON, ETC.
10 THE HUNGARIAN BROTHERS.....Miss Porter.
11 MARRIAGE .....Miss Ferrier.
12 INHERITANCE ..... Ditto.
13 DESTINY ..... Ditto.
14 THE KING'S OWN .....Captain Marryat.
15 THE NAVAL OFFICER ..... Ditto.
16 NEWTON FORSTER ..... Ditto.
17 RICHELIEU .....G. P. R. James.
18 DARNLEY..... Ditto.
19 PHILIP AUGUSTUS..... Ditto.
20 TOM CRINGLE'S LOG .....Michael Scott.
21 PETER SIMPLE.....Captain Marryat.
22 MARY OF BURGUNDY .....G. P. R. James.
23 JACOB FAITHFUL.....Captain Marryat.
24 THE GIPSY.....G. P. R. James.
25 THE CRUISE OF THE MIDGE...Michael Scott.
26 TWO YEARS BEFORE THE MAST .....Dana.
27 THE PIRATE, AND THE THREE CUTTERS Captain Marryat.
28 HENRY MASTERTON .....G. P. R. James.
29 JOHN MARSTON HALL..... Ditto.
30 JAPHET IN SEARCH OF A FATHER. Marryat.
31 THE WOLFE OF BADENOCH. Sir T. D. Lauder.
32 CALEB WILLIAMS .....Wm. Godwin.
33 THE PACHA OF MANY TALES. Capt. Marryat.
34 THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD ..... Goldsmith.
35 MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY ..... Capt. Marryat.
36 ATTILA.....G. P. R. James.
37 RORY O'MORE ....Samuel Lover.
38 PELHAM .....Lytton Bulwer.
39 THE DISOWNED ..... Ditto.
40 DEVEREUX ..... Ditto.
41 PAUL CLIFFORD ..... Ditto.
42 EUGENE ARAM ..... Ditto.
43 THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII Ditto.
44 RIENZI ..... Ditto.
45 ERNEST MALTRAVERS ..... Ditto.
46 STORIES OF WATERLOO .....W. H. Maxwell.
47 THE BIVOUAC; OR, STORIES OF THE PENINSULAR WAR.....W. H. Maxwell.
48 ALICE .....Lytton Bulwer.
49 THE ROBBER .....G. P. R. James.
50 CYRIL THORNTON .....Capt. T. Hamilton.
51 REGINALD DALTON .....J. G. Lockhart.
52 THE WIDOW BARNABY .....Mrs. Trollope.
53 TOPSAIL SHEET BLOCKS .....M. H. Barker.
54 THE HUGUENOT.....G. P. R. James.
55 THE SAUCY ARETHUSA.....Capt. Chamier.
56 JACK BRAG .....Theodore Hook.
57 THE PHANTOM SHIP ..... Captain Marryat.
58 ROBINSON CRUSOE.....Daniel Defoe.
59 THE PICKWICK PAPERS .....Charles Dickens.
60 HARRY LORREQUER.....Charles Lever.
61 THE DOG FIEND ....Captain Marryat.
62 NICHOLAS NICKLEBY .....Charles Dickens.
63 OLIVER TWIST .....Charles Dickens.
64 BEN BRACE ..... Captain Chamier.
65 TOM BOWLING ..... Ditto.
66 NIGHT AND MORNING ..... Lytton Bulwer.
67 POOR JACK ..... Captain Marryat.
68 THE POACHER ..... Ditto.
70 THE THREE MUSKETEERS .....A. Dumas.
71 TWENTY YEARS AFTER .....A. Dumas.
72 SYLVESTER SOUND ..... Henry Cockton.
73 THE LOVE MATCH ..... Ditto.
74 THE CLOCKMAKER .....Sam Slick.
75 BARNABY RUDGE ..... Charles Dickens.
76 THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP..... Ditto.
77 TEN THOUSAND A YEAR, Part I. S. Warren.
78 Ditto. Part II. Ditto.
79 PERCIVAL KEENE .....Captain Marryat.
82 HANDY ANDY .....Samuel Lover.
83 FOREST DAYS .....G. P. R. James.
84 THE LAST OF THE BARONS...Lytton Bulwer.
85 HECTOR O'HALLORAN .....W. H. Maxwell.
86 MASTERMAN READY.....Captain Marryat.
87 TOUGH YARNS....."The Old Sailor."
88 THE SCARLET LETTER ..... Hawthorne.
89 JACK HINTON.....Charles Lever.
90 MORLEY ERNSTEIN .....G. P. R. James.
91 THE PRIVATEERSMAN .....Captain Marryat.
92 TREASURE TROVE .....Samuel Lover.
93 TWO OLD MEN'S TALES .....Mrs. Marsh.
94 MARGARET CATCHPOLE .....R. Cobbold.
95 TOM BURKE OF OURS .....C. Lever.
96 MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT .....Charles Dickens.
97 MOUNT SOREL .....Mrs. Marsh.
98 THE BRIGAND .....G. P. R. James.
99 VALENTINE VOX ..... H. Cockton.
100 THE SMUGGLER .....G. P. R. James.
101 A BAD BOY'S DIARY.
102 THE BLUNDERS OF A BASHFUL MAN.
103 HELEN'S BABIES.
105 THE WIDOW BEDOTT PAPERS.
107 TAG, RAG, AND CO. .....James Greenwood.
108 ODD PEOPLE IN ODD PLACES. Ditto.
109 DINING WITH DUKE HUMPHREY. Ditto.
110 MR. BARNES OF NEW YORK...A. C. Gunter.
111 ARRAH NEIL ..... G. P. R. James.
112 EMILIA WYNDHAM ..... Mrs. Marsh.
113 THE GHOST HUNTER & HIS FAMILY, J. Banim.
114 THE O'DONOGHUE ..... C. Lever.
115 THE PRINCE OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID J. H. Ingraham.
116 THE YOUNG DUKE..... B. Disraeli.
117 VENETIA ..... Ditto.
118 ALROY ..... Ditto.
119 HENRIETTA TEMPLE ..... Ditto.
120 VIVIAN GREY ..... Ditto.
121 SYBIL..... Ditto.
122 CONINGSBY ..... Ditto.
123 CONTARINI FLEMING ..... Ditto.
124 THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD...Susan Warner.
125 QUEECHY ..... Ditto.
126 MR. PERKINS OF NEW JERSEY, Gay Parker.
127 MARY ANNE WELLINGTON ..... R. Cobbold.
128 THE TOWER OF LONDON...W. H. Ainsworth.
129 WINDSOR CASTLE ..... Ditto.
130 ROOKWOOD ..... Ditto.
131 PAUL JONES ..... A. Dumas.
132 THE MISSING PARTNER T. McClaren Cobban.
133 THE SISTERS.....Henry Cockton.
134 THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME. V. Hugo.
135 THE MISER'S DAUGHTER...W. H. Ainsworth
136 RUY BLAS
137 JANE EYRE .....Charlotte Brontë
138 NOW AND THEN .....S. Warren
139 "MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND" A. L. Harris

—:o:—

LONDON AND NEW YORK: FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.

WARNE'S LONDON LIBRARY.

Price ONE SHILLING each.

A Popular Series of Original Copyright Novels and Stories by well known Authors.

In Small Crown 8vo, sewed.

1. FOUND OUT. By Helen Mathers.
2. A FAIR BARBARIAN. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
3. TINTED VAPOURS: A Nemesis. By J. Maclaren Cobban.
4. BOOTLES' BABY: A Story of the Scarlet Lancers. By J. S. Winter.
5. STRUCK DOWN: A Tale of Devon. By Capt. Hawley Smart.
6. HOUP-LA. By J. S. Winter.
7. AT BAY. By Mrs. Alexander.
8. GOBLIN GOLD. By May Crommelin.
9. BEATON'S BARGAIN. By Mrs. Alexander.
10. JOHN BODEWIN'S TESTIMONY. By Mary Hallock Foote.
11. THE LAST OF THE DACRES. By Evelyn Everett Green.
12. MY FRIEND BELLAMY. By W. G. Waters.
13. A WOMAN'S WILL. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
14. NATALIE: and Other Stories. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
15. THEO: A Love Story. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
16. A GIRL IN A THOUSAND. By Jean Middlemass.
17. A WILFUL YOUNG WOMAN. By Mrs. Alice Price.
18. RUTHVEN OF RUTHVEN. or, All or Nothing. By E. Everett Green.
19. A RUSTIC MAID. By Mrs. Alice Price.
20. THE FORTUNES OF PHILIPPA FAIRFAX. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
21. THAT LASS O' LOWRIE'S. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
22. PAUL JONES. By Alexander Dumas.
23. DUNRAVEN RANCH. By Capt. Charles King.
24. FOR ENGLAND'S SAKE. By Robert Cromie.
25. THE TIDE ON THE MOANING BAR. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
26. KATHLEEN: A Love Story. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
27. DOLLY: A Love Story. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
28. LINDSAY'S LUCK. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
29. PRETTY POLLY PEMBERTON. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
30. MISS CRESPIGNY. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
31. ESMERALDA: and Other Stories. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
32. SURLY TIM: and Other Stories. By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
33. £40,000; or, the Mystery of the Rungapore. By Ross Gordon.
34. RUY BLAS. Founded on the Drama by Victor Hugo.
35. BY THE WORLD FORGOT. By E. J. Clayden.

—:o:—

LONDON AND NEW YORK: FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.

NOBILITY OF LIFE.

"WHO BEST CAN SUFFER, BEST CAN DO."—*MILTON.*

The Victorian Reign is unparalleled in the History of Great Empires for its Purity, Goodness, and Greatness.

ABOVE ALL!!!

A FEARLESS DEVOTION TO DUTY AND UNFLINCHING TRUTHFULNESS!

THE QUEEN'S PRIZE!

The conditions laid down by the QUEEN for the Prize given by HER MAJESTY to the Marine Boys are these :—

Cheerful Submission to Superiors; Self-respect and Independence of Character; Kindness and Protection to the Weak; Readiness to Forgive Offence; a Desire to Conciliate the Differences of Others; and, above all, Fearless Devotion to Duty, and Unflinching Truthfulness.

"Such principles, if evoked and carried into action, would produce an almost perfect moral character IN EVERY CONDITION OF LIFE."—SMILES.

SHAKESPEARE AND DUTY { "Come the corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them; nought shall make us rue,
IF ENGLAND TO HERSELF DO REST BUT TRUE."

THE PIVOT OF DUTY.—Sterling Honesty of Purpose; without it Life is a Sham.

WHAT HIGHER DUTY CAN MAN ATTAIN, THAN CONQUEST OVER HUMAN PAIN?

IN THE BATTLE OF THIS LIFE ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" is an imperative hygienic need or necessary adjunct. It keeps the blood pure, prevents and cures fevers, acute inflammatory diseases, and removes the injurious effects of stimulants, narcotics such as alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, by natural means; thus restores the nervous system to its normal condition, by preventing the great danger of poisoned blood and over-cerebral activity, sleeplessness, irritability, worry, etc.

SUPERIOR TO ALL OTHER SALINES.—"Dear Sir,—Having taken your 'FRUIT SALT' many years, I think it right to tell you that I consider it a most invaluable medicine, and far superior to all other saline mixtures. I am never without a bottle of it in the house. It possesses three most desirable qualities—pleasant to the taste, promptly efficacious, and leaves no unpleasant after-effects.
"A DEVONSHIRE LADY.—Jan. 25, 1889."

THE GREAT DANGER OF SUGAR, PINK OR CHEMICALLY COLOURED SHERBET.—Experience shows that sugar, pink or chemically coloured sherbet, mild ales, port wine, dark sherries, sweet champagne, liqueurs, and brandy are all very apt to disagree, while light wines and gin, or old whisky, largely diluted with seltzer water, will be found the least objectionable. ENO'S 'FRUIT SALT' is peculiarly adapted for any constitutional weakness of the liver. It possesses the power of reparation when digestion has been disturbed or lost, and places the invalid on the right track to health.

HOW KANDAHAR WAS WON.

"During the Afghan war we were before Kandahar, and had been reconnoitring the enemy's position with Colonel M———'s splendid cavalry regiment, when, to our merriment, the Colonel produced a bottle of ENO'S 'FRUIT SALT.' 'Take,' he said, 'an old soldier's advice;' so, to please him we did. We emptied the bottle. And Colonel M——— gave another bottle to P———'s men. We certainly slept soundly that night, and awoke as fresh as paint. Two days afterwards, the Colonel said at mess, 'You fellows laughed at me about ENO'S "FRUIT SALT," but it was mainly through that stuff I gave you, you did such splendid deeds that day. Personally,' said the Colonel, 'I never felt better, and so do the officers of my regiment, and we were ready to encounter half a dozen Ayoobs.' After that the Colonel was always called 'Old Eno.'"—*From "MESS STORIES," by* PROTEUS, *pp.* 126, 127, *published by Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall & Co., Stationer's Hall Court,* 1889.

CAUTION.—*Examine each bottle, and see that the Capsule is marked* "ENO'S FRUIT SALT." *Without it, you have been imposed on by a worthless and occasionally poisonous imitation.*

Sold by all Chemists. Prepared only at

ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" WORKS, LONDON, S.E., BY J. C. ENO'S PATENT.

CURIOUS ADVERTISEMENT OF 100 YEARS AGO !!

PEARS' SOAP

gives com-
-plexions
as
vnto
new
milk
and
ripe
cherries

Comely dames, brave squires, pretty little misses,
& smart little masters, regularly use

PEARS' SOAP

Pears — Soapmaker to ye King

Pears' Soap can be bought at all ye shoppes

CAMDEN PRESS, LONDON, N.W.